RABINDRANATH TAGORE

PIONEER IN EDUCATION

Essays and Exchanges between Rabindranath Tagore and L. K. Elmhirst

The photograph on the jacket was taken in Peiping, China in April 1924. Left to right are Professor General Tsiang and his two children, L. K. Elmhirst, Rabindranath Tagore and the Chinese poet, Shu Tsemou.

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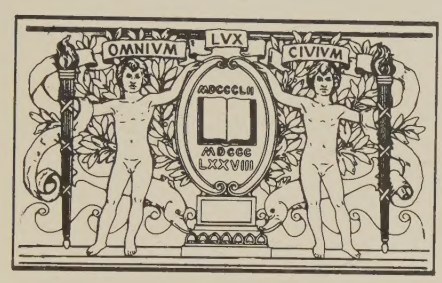

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RABINDRANATH TAGORE

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Left to right, Professor General Tsiang and his two children, L. K. Elmhirst, Rabindranath Tagore, the Chinese poet, Shu Tsemou. Peiping 1924.

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To

Dorothy Whitney Straight

who made Sriniketan possible

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PREFACE

OF THE MANY SERVICES rendered to his countrymen by Rabindranath Tagore one of the most notable was his readiness, as a young man, to challenge the accepted conventions of his day, and to do this in Calcutta when Calcutta was the British imperial capital of India. In this he seems to have been encouraged by his father Debendranath and his older brothers and to have been championed and urged on by his nephews Abanindranath, Samarendranath and Gaganendranath.

Equipped with magnificent physique and immense energy, with an active mind and a most fertile imagination, he remained to the end of his long life, even when his body began to fail him, sensitive to new ideas and to every form of natural beauty. His reaction to the atmosphere immediately around him was strangely intuitive. From adolescence on he poured forth a never-failing stream of artistic creation in poems, dramas, novels and essays; in music, in song, with music and words to match one another, and finally in pictures. In defiance of contemporary custom, he used in his writing the common idiom and not the classical Bengali of the literati, as Dante had done before him in Italy and Chaucer in England: so that he was readily appreciated by all to whom Bengali was a mother tongue. In

later years he wrote and lectured in English, but only when he felt he had so to do in order to reach an audience beyond the confines of Bengal. In producing with the boys, girls and staff of his school his own musical dramas and plays he habitually acted one of the principal roles; and, when he hired a theatre in Calcutta, he broke all the ancient traditions about not permitting girls of good and respected families ever to appear in public on the stage whether to sing, dance or act.

Tagore was already sixty years old when, at my first meeting with him in New York in the spring of 1921, he put a challenge to me which was immediately accepted. Only later on did I realize that the problems he had raised with me must have troubled him for at least thirty years. To solve them he had tried a variety of experiments and had invested money he could ill spare without having found any satisfactory answer.

'The villages around my school at Santiniketan in West Bengal seem to me,' he said, 'to be dying. Yet all of them, Hindu, Muslim and primitive Santal, show signs that they once enjoyed a decent economic and social condition and a culture that no longer survives. The villagers too seem quite unable to help themselves. When I was quite a young man my father put me in charge of our family estate in East Bengal, and there I tried my own experiments. Some years ago I bought a farm with further experiments in mind, outside the village of Surul, a mile and a half from my school at Santiniketan. You say you were interested in what you saw of the Indian village and its problems in 1917. Come to

India and live on this farm. Try to find out what is happening, and what the cause of the trouble is, what can be done to help the villagers to help themselves and to stand on their own feet. Train up some of my staff and students if you can. Will you come? Then why not sail with me tomorrow.'

Before World War I my studies were of history at Cambridge and my home was in Yorkshire. On being released from the army in 1919, I had borrowed fifty pounds with which to cross the Atlantic and to register at Cornell University for a course in the science and economics of practical farming. I had had to earn my board and lodging by kitchen work, by teaching English and by working as a farm hand. I had hoped to complete my studies in the August of 1921. After graduation and after overcoming some opposition at home I sailed for India and joined Tagore at Santiniketan on the 28th of November. On 5th February 1922, with a small staff and some ten college students, all of whom said they wanted to be farmers, we set out for the village of Surul and took up residence on the poet's farm. We fixed up our latrines, started gardens, houses and workshops, defeated the marauding monkeys, and settled in.

After some months we called ourselves an 'Institute of Rural Reconstruction,' but we were later named by Tagore, Sriniketan, which is Sanskrit for 'The Abode of Grace.'

In Chapter I, I have tried to put down some recollections of those early days at Sriniketan. Our survey of the local problems and our search for solutions led us to invest the main part of our energies in a variety of experiments in

education. We drew from the experience and fertile imagination of Tagore himself, but also upon some of the principles that lay behind Baden Powell's 'Scouting for Boys,' and upon the inspiration of the 4H Club Movement which I had seen at work in America.

The first chapter in this book on the early history of Sriniketan was written at the invitation of the Ministry of Community Development at New Delhi and was published in the *Visva-Bharati* (Tagore's University) *Quarterly*.

While Sriniketan was struggling to get established, Gandhi was also busy hammering into shape the political programme of the Indian Congress with which he hoped within a few months to win freedom for India from British imperial control. He had tried in October 1921 in a variety of ways to associate Tagore with this programme. But Tagore was too anxious to stand by his own life's work in education and tried to avoid direct implication in a political movement, however non-violent. To the end of his days he had a deep understanding of and sympathy for Gandhi, but in 1922 he was determined to press forward with his own plan for welcoming scholars and artists from all over the world, who wanted to study India at first hand and in an Indian setting. Far from resisting the sciences, physical and social, and their broad application to the raising of living standards in India, he urged Indian students everywhere to master them all so that they might help India to her feet. But he insisted that alongside this material advance must go the search for a creative and cultural life, through which all classes and ages might find a natural outlet for that wealth

of feeling, emotion and sensitivity with which he knew the peoples of Asia were naturally endowed.

Without the cultivation of wonder and without free expression for the imagination in dance, music, drama, pattern and poetry, he felt that purely material or political progress might prove insufficient to harness the vital and creative spirit and energy of his people.

Out of his own experience as a teacher of boys and girls from mainly middle-class families in Calcutta and from his study of our work at Sriniketan with village boys, he was convinced that some new form of schooling could be worked out for village children in India, based upon immediate contact with the world of Nature and with the life, the beauty and the problems of the countryside. He urged us to establish a weekly boarding school for village boys. This he named Siksha-Satra, and invited me to collaborate with him over a statement of the principles and practice that could be applied within such a group, if for five nights and days each week they left home and were free to engage in a variety of practical enterprises. This statement with Tagore's introduction forms Chapter II and Chapter III. It was first published as a pamphlet at Santiniketan in 1925.

Some years after I had left, Gandhi paid a visit to this school and was so impressed that he urged Tagore to loan him the service of the headmaster of Siksha-Satra to help him plan an all-India revolution in primary education. Tagore laughingly volunteered on the spot to be Gandhi's first Minister of Education. Gandhi, finding that the headmaster was not available, engaged another member of

Tagore's staff from the school at Santiniketan and chose the term 'Basic Education' for the system which was then worked out for him and which still operates under that name. But 'Basic' draws only in part upon the ideas of Tagore, and has had grafted on to it other ideas to which Tagore would not have given his approval.

Before leaving India for China in the spring of 1924 as Tagore's secretary, I asked him to incorporate in a talk to the staff and students at Sriniketan some account in Bengali of the development of his own philosophy of life since his early youth, as he had told it to me during our travel together. Although he never relished the task of turning his Bengali phrases into English he completed the translation before we set sail, and the English version of his talk is included as Chapter IV.

The sufferings of Tagore as a child at the hands of schoolmasters and in formal classes are a constant theme in his writings on education. Not long before the time of my arrival he wrote in English and published as a pamphlet in Calcutta an imaginative commentary to illustrate his scepticism as to why the tortures he had endured in the name of education should not qualify for the title 'Parrot's Training.' This was illustrated with caricatures by his nephews the artists Abanindranath and Gaganendranath Tagore. The text is reprinted here, and for the first time outside India, by the kind permission of Tagore's son, the late Rathindranath Tagore; it forms Chapter V.

As an illustration of exactly the opposite kind of approach to education, Tagore enlarged to me upon the need of

children to express their ideas and feelings with their whole bodies, not just in formal games or drill but in movement of the widest possible variety. It was during his convalescence in Argentina in December 1924, when we were alone together as guests of Madame Victoria Ocampo in her house at San Isidro, that I took down what he said. The transcript is reprinted here as Chapter VI by permission of the Visva-Bharati Press. The late Rudolf Laban was anxious to have this account printed in the journal of his Art of Movement Studio, but the circulation of this being limited to specialist teachers I have thought it quite appropriate to this volume, if Tagore's broad approach to the needs of growing children is to be understood.

It was my privilege to travel in India with Tagore in the fall of 1923, in the spring of 1924 to China and Japan, in the winter of 1924 in Argentina and in Italy early in 1925. When he was under strain or duress of any kind, I learned how sadly astray the perpetual flame of his imagination could occasionally lead him. One illustration will suffice. To find the money for the return journey to India from Japan for himself and his three Indian companions, was no easy matter. He had composed on the voyage to China poetic couplets in Bengali. These he translated into English, and I was commissioned to sell them to some Japanese gentlemen, who manufactured face creams and who, I discovered later, published the leading ladies' beauty paper in Japan. The couplets were to be translated from English into Japanese and published at so much a couplet. The deal was made. But during the night the poetic imagination soared,

and an attempt at a re-sale at a higher figure was commanded for the following morning. The international tempers that were aroused on that occasion were heated but comparatively simple to deal with, compared to other tempers that arose in other countries at a later date.

In contrast to these rare occasions, what positive wings this supreme gift of imagination could give to his fertile mind and wit. The twinkle of that sparkling eye, the worry, anger or rage that could furrow that regal brow, the deep and musical sound of his voice in speech, in recitation, in jest or in the excitement of some meal-time discussion, had to be experienced to be credible. In the first years of our acquaintance his voice in song could and did still hold exact pitch. When some discussion of ideas was over or a meal cleared away, his eyelids would fall very slightly over the eyes. This I soon learned to recognize as a sign that his mind had turned in an inward direction, and that an almost complete withdrawal from the outer world had, as if by magic, been achieved or at least was urgently desired. Each night as we voyaged in equable climes his chair was set on deck, so that he could rise while it was yet dark and be there to welcome the first sign of dawn. This was his daily custom at home, and the prelude to his regular morning's meditation.

One night in Baroda a severe attack of fever compelled me to stay uneasily balanced on the edge of sleep throughout the night. Every hour or so I was conscious of the door being quietly opened and of the presence of a silent but sympathetic listener.

Some uninformed people thought Tagore was habitually antagonistic to the British race, because he never hesitated to point out how disastrous the results of a philistine and an insensitive imperialism could be to both parties, ruler and ruled. He could on occasion be just as severe in his criticism of his own people, or of the Japanese in their unprincipled approach to China.

After the war broke out in all its terror in 1940, he wrote just before his death: 'Your people belong to a tremendously vital race. . . . In your history you have never once lost your ground when attacked and the same history will this time repeat itself. . . . It will lead you into greater wisdom, to a saner estimation of your power and to that generous disposal of it which alone can ensure its perpetuity.'

How gay could be his laughter, how childlike his delight over the gift of a basket of ripe mangoes, of a box of chocolates, of a plate of American ice cream or of strawberries with cream of the Devonshire variety! How mischievous could be his sense of fun, but never cruel or unkind. 'Sing me again,' he would say, 'the song of the "Wraggle Taggle Gipsies" before we go to bed.'

To struggle with him so that for one vital or necessary moment his sovran reason might win battle over some too fantastic flight of his poetic fancy, this was to join battle with a Titan.

Leonard Elmhirst

The Foundation of Sriniketan

L.K. Elmhirst

IN 1890 RABINDRANATH TAGORE, then aged twenty-nine, was sent to take charge of the family estate in East Bengal. He went to live at Shelidah, and came, he said, for the first time into direct touch with the people of the villages, with their sufferings and with their many problems of cultivation, of credit and of marketing. There, too, he listened to their songs, their dramas and their festivals. But, he said, too often they came to him as zemindar and landlord, or to the District Collector, like beggars, unable, seemingly, to stand on their own feet as free and independent individuals. This experience he never forgot. Ten years later, when he was nearing forty, he moved with his family from Calcutta to Santiniketan, to start his school there. From then on certain ideas were clearly engraved in his mind: to try to rescue children from some of the frustrations he had suffered as a boy in the name of education; to cultivate and develop the arts of life—poetry, song, drama, movement in dance and design; lastly, to discover whether or not the Bengal villager could learn to stand upright upon his own sturdy feet and begin to solve at least some of his many problems for himself.

For the latter purpose, he knew that appropriate land would be needed close to some village where studies could be made and science could be applied. Early in the century he purchased from Lord Sinha some twenty bighas of land, a mile to the west of Santiniketan and just outside the village of Surul. With it went the empty house of the former superintending engineer, with the derelict sheds to which the parts of the East India Railway engines had been sent in the 1870s to be assembled. In those days, Surul had the reputation of being a health resort and free of the scourge of malaria. It was never so free again

Tagore then looked around for someone to man his experiment. In turn, he sent his son, his adopted son and his son-in-law to colleges in America, in the hope that they might one day take up residence on this farm and discover some way of approaching the root problem, as he saw it, of how to promote village self-help. For one reason or another the experiments tried out at Surul gave negative rather than positive results. Even these were of use. A further experiment was tried out at Surul, during 1920 and 1921, by a group of young men under the inspiration of C. F. Andrews. This again produced negative results. The whole team fell victim to a malignant form of malaria. The anxieties and suspicions of the villagers around Surul, to which villagers the world over are prone when faced suddenly with a new idea or a demand for change, were not lessened by these experiments.

In the spring of 1921, two American friends, Sam Higginbottom and Mrs W. V. Moody, told Tagore,

while he was in America, of a young Englishman named Elmhirst, who was then studying agriculture and earning his living by part-time teaching at Cornell University. They said they knew that, although he had his M.A. in history from Cambridge University, he was anxious to return to India and study its village problems at first hand.

I remember well the morning in the spring of 1921 when a telegram reached me at Ithaca, from TAGORE, which read, COME AND SEE ME IN NEW YORK. I had always been excited by what I had read of Santiniketan and of Tagore, and had hoped, when I was in India between 1915 and 1918, to visit the school. I made a hurried journey to New York, and shall never forget the friendly welcome I received. 'I have,' said Tagore, 'an institution of learning and the arts at Santiniketan which is mainly academic. It is surrounded by villages, some Hindu, some Muslim, some Santal, but all are decaying; all had an ancient culture, but today they appear sick. They are dying. Will you come and help me to find out why? Would you be prepared to go and live in a village? You would like to consider it? Then how about sailing back with me tomorrow?' 'But,' said I, 'if I am really to be of any use to you, I must first finish my course at Cornell.'

Immediately on my return to England in August 1921, I cabled Tagore, CAN I COME? I received a message in return, from Charlie Andrews, DON'T COME, NO FUNDS AVAILABLE. Luckily, Willie Pearson was on leave from the school at Santiniketan, where he was teaching, and at his home in Manchester. I went there to consult him, and together we

composed the following cable, FUNDS AVAILABLE, CAN I COME? to which the answer came back, DELIGHTED, COME, RABINDRANATH TAGORE.

I arrived at Santiniketan on 28th November 1921, and was immediately taken to see Tagore. The gist of his welcome was as follows. 'I have talked to our college students. Ten of them say they would like to leave the college department right away and learn to be farmers. Three members of my staff, too, who have not lately become involved in politics, are also anxious to help. So is my son, who was trained as an engineer. The farm at Surul is there. How soon can you start?'

I asked for time to visit agricultural training centres in India, to gather equipment and to learn Bengali.

'Visits you must make,' said Tagore, 'equipment you must get, but why learn Bengali? Our students all know English, so do the staff. Once you have learned Bengali, you will make the same mistake that so many missionaries have made. You will go out and visit villages alone. I hope you will never visit a village alone, or ask questions of villagers without using a member of your staff or one of your students as an interpreter. The task of getting to know and to understand the village and its people must be carried out by Indians, but from you and other visitors they should learn what kind of questions to ask and how to ask them.'

I started out immediately on my visits and went to Allahabad to see Sam Higginbottom. There I bought a he-goat, and persuaded the guard of the train to call it a dog and let me bring it home in the dog-box and on a dog's ticket. I

made purchases with the help and advice of Rathindranath Tagore, Kalimohan Ghose, Gour Gopal Ghose, Suren Kor and Santosh Majumdar. Little did I realize then with what respect and affection I should come to regard these devoted advisers. I also took my regular lessons in Bengali from Boroma, the daughter-in-law of Dwijendranath Tagore. She is still alive. The lessons were soon to be cut short.

1922 Early in January 1922, Tagore sent for me. 'Stop your Bengali lessons,' he said. 'How soon can you, with your staff and students, move to Surul?' Three weeks later, on 5th February, we loaded our Ford lorry with cooking pots and set off for Surul, camping out in the old engineer's house, myself on the roof, staff on the ground floor, students one floor up. That afternoon we dug trenches and fixed up latrines with buckets not too far from the well, round which boys and staff took their morning bath. 'But where,' said the boys, 'is the sweeper who will empty the latrine buckets?' Three of them were Brahmins. 'Don't worry, there'll be a sweeper in the morning,' I said. The following morning, while they were taking their baths they caught sight of me emptying the buckets. Three boys and Alu Roy, our celebrated lorry driver, immediately ran to assist. 'If this is to be part of the training,' they said, 'can we not do it for ourselves from now on?' It was three months before the resistance of the last Brahmin boy broke down. From then on there were few jobs of the meanest or toughest kind that these boys would not tackle readily.

For a time I saw little of Tagore. One or other of the staff kept him in touch. They told me, the same week we

set out, that they had found him digging a trench in his garden and emptying his own bucket of waste matter into it. Turning over his letters, I find in one of them, dated 31st March 1922, the following:

'Every day I am getting more and more envious of your Swaraj at Surul, especially when I hear of your hens contributing their dues to the Commonwealth. Plato had no place for poets in his Republic. . . . I wish I were young enough to be able to join you and perform the meanest work that can be done in your place, thus getting rid of that filmy web of respectability that shuts me off from intimate touch with Mother Dust. It is something unclean like prudery itself to have to ask a sweeper to serve that deity who is in charge of the primal cradle of life.'

There were many obstacles, due either to caste or to the workings of an out-dated caste system, that we found hampering to any idea of change in village life. Tagore had this same subject in mind two years later, when he said to me:

'In India, the real cause of the weakness that cripples our spirit of freedom arises from the impregnable social walls we raise between the different castes. These check the natural flow of fellow-feeling among the people who live in our country. The law of love and of mutual respect has been ignored for the sake of retaining an artificial order. This only serves to promote a sense of degeneracy and of defeat. The people of India in this way have built their own cage; but by trying to secure their freedom from one another, they only succeed in keeping themselves eternally captive.'

But, though the students were soon hard at work, we all knew that the stiffest job had yet to be faced. For years, centuries perhaps, farmers, tenants, landless labourers and craftsmen had been accustomed, in time of need, to turn to some local father figure, rajah, landlord or government officer, for help. Tagore had himself raised this problem in our discussions in December. I quote here from my diary, written at the time:—

'Tagore said that, though a zemindar, he had, when living at Shelidah, himself urged his own ryots to rise and strike a blow for themselves, and had told them that if they did not there was little hope for them. He prophesied that from the first we were likely to arouse a variety of bitter opposition and to discover every kind of petty oppression of one group by another.'

The first reaction to us as newly arrived residents in the countryside was inevitably one of fear and suspicion. 'Are you a tax official come to raise our rents, or a missionary sent to break up our homes?' I remember being asked, as far back as 1918, on visiting a village in the Deccan. The second reaction of the village was also a natural one. 'If these people have money to spend, what kind of flattery or bribe or foolish response from us do they want so that we may benefit? If this man is not an oppressor, then he must be a fool. How big a fool?'

Our problem was, therefore, first to make a definite contact with a village, any village, then to prove that we were not oppressors, and then to show that we were not fools. We had to convince them that we had one chief

object, to prove to them, after winning their respect, that there were quite a number of ways in which they could, by helping themselves, keep and increase their own self-respect and slowly achieve a new and more potent command over their generally tragic and poverty-stricken environment.

From the outset, Kalimohan Ghose, who had had wide experience in East Bengal, was our chief interpreter and contact-maker with the village. He laid the foundation for all our work with the village. From his first contact, he nearly always managed to convey to the village the feeling that he had an immense respect for the simplest individual, man or woman, boy or girl, as if he knew there was something he wanted to learn from each one of them. His obvious capacity to respect seemed so easily to win respect in return. The going in the beginning was often discouraging and certainly tough. Try as we did to remain friends with the local zemindars, their suspicions and fears were constantly aroused.

There was a riot in a village one day. The injured were brought in to us to be given first aid. Could we come and visit a sick woman in the village? She was treated by me in somewhat amateur fashion and, luckily, recovered. Sitting with the elders afterward, we asked if we might collect their boys and teach them some games. No! Even the little boys were really too busy herding the village cattle; and, anyhow, if we got hold of them, we would probably drill them and they would soon be sent off to Mesopotamia, as in World War I. We might teach them a few games in the evening, but no drill! Could we, on the other hand, come

and shoot monkeys in the village, that were doing so much damage to their crops? We responded, 'Would you pay for the cartridges?' After some discussion, for these were Hindu cultivators, they answered, 'Yes, for either we or the monkeys must leave the village.' Then a terrible day came when a spark set the roofs of half the houses in the village on fire. Two days later we visited the village and called out their boys and rehearsed them as a fire brigade. 'Let's have a real fire and see what they do,' said the elders. 'We'll supply some straw, and see whether they can put it out.' Some straw was brought, tied up a tree and lit, the alarm gong was rung, bucket teams ran to the site and had the fire out in five minutes. The greybeards gathered. 'Sir,' they said to Kalimohan, 'we apologize. We see the use of your fire drill. We old men will now drill for you, if you agree, and see whether we can do as well as the boys.' They repeated the drill, but took two minutes longer than the boys. 'And who,' we asked, 'will captain your fire brigade?' 'This man,' they said. 'Then,' we answered, 'he must have charge, at his house, of buckets, ladder, gong and fire hooks.' 'No,' they answered, 'this man is the most courageous of us all when a fire breaks out, but, when there is no fire, he will probably use the buckets on his farm, and they will never be in place when needed. That is the man over there, whom we can absolutely trust with the buckets.' And so it was arranged. After that, we were left much more free to come and go in the village, and to ask questions. We were even encouraged to spend more time with the boys, and, somewhat later, with the girls as well.

I was still too busy to see much of Tagore, but staff and boys, I later realized, kept him in touch with our progress every step of the way, and far more closely than I realized at the time.

It was Tagore who emphasized to us the major role the boys and girls could play in the village, once they were stirred by an education built around their own need to grow, to imagine, and to explore. The indirect effect of their activity upon the age-long customs and attitudes of their parents might be revolutionary. The parents might be won from a negative defeatism and dependency to a positive pride in the achievement of their children, and so to applying self-help to themselves, provided their confidence in us was retained. It was Tagore who encouraged more and more survey and investigation, not for its own sake by theorists, but directed all the time toward specific problems. Science was to be our servant, never our master. Ten years later, he confirmed this view in a letter which illustrated how deeply implicated he felt in every aspect of the progress of Sriniketan.

'It is true,' he wrote, 'that when Mr X. first came to us I assured him of a complete freedom about the work which he was going to take in hand. I also had the idea that it should be something comprehensive and not fractional. It may seem foolish of me to anticipate, but I am sure that you know that this is how I always welcome all the workers who come to me, and express their willingness to offer their service for the love of the cause. It does not mean that we have things ready for them like a cage for the bird, but that

they should have to win themselves the seat which is their own, through patience and perseverance, through establishing mutual understanding among their colleagues and firm faith in the institution, in spite of obstructions and inefficiencies that are often inevitable. If they fail, then they should not begin to accuse everybody else but themselves for choosing the particular path which must have been foreign to them. You know you had from me the same unstinted welcome yourself when you first came to me as a stranger. Your path was not too smooth and there were factors that were obdurately obstructive. You won your place and justified my trust in you. You won it through your power of vision, through a wisdom that was helped by imagination, that could see things in their totality, and would not accept as final whatever was imperfect during its process of being.

'The ideal which I cherish in my heart for the work I have been struggling to build up through the best portion of my mature life, does not need qualifications that are divided into compartments. It was not the Kingdom of the Expert in the midst of the inept and ignorant which we wanted to establish, although the expert's advice is valuable. The villages are waiting for the living touch of creative faith, and not for the cold aloofness of science which uses efficient machinery for extracting statistics, the statistics that deal with fragments of dissected life. I remember how you came fresh from your university and you were absurdly young, but you were not in the least academic or aridly intellectual. With your instinctive humanity you came into

the closest touch with the living being which is the village, and which is not a mere intellectual problem that could be solved through the help of arithmetical figures. I have personal experience of scientists who think that they know human facts, without taking the trouble to know the man himself. It is not for them to create and not even to construct, they never have done it, though they help. You had human sympathy in abundance, which was the principal motive power that carried you across all the difficulties that stood against you in their congregated might. You rightly named your work Village Reconstruction Work, for it was a living work comprehending village life in all its various activities, and not merely productive of analytic knowledge.

'A visitor may compare Sriniketan with other institutions of a similar nature in other big countries and, ashamed of the paltriness of our own efforts, may advise us to abandon it. This is like comparing the mothers of our country with those in the West, who possibly carry on their maternal duties more intelligently and with greater efficiency, and then to say that this mother business should be altogether given up in India. Yet mother love *does* work even in the East though not fully supplemented by medical science. The principal element is there. Similarly, the valuable gift of sympathy in some of our humble workers has worked a miracle, which must not be contemptuously mentioned because it has neither been measured nor accurately recorded.

'The immense benefit realized by the surrounding villages through the constant inspiration of sympathy and

encouragement of Sriniketan must never be belittled in favour of some impersonal abstractions of science, however valuable they may be. I, who am no scientist, set more value upon this human side of our service than anything which is academic. I can never believe that specialists are in their proper place at the head of organizations, where constant co-ordination of human factors has to be made through personal contact and wisdom born of sympathy. The function of specialists, with their equipment for detailed analysis and statistics of facts, should be to serve the makers of history, those guides and lovers of men who, possessing the gift of imaginative understanding, can vitalize knowlege and make it acceptable to others.'

After only six months' work, Tagore asked us to try and formulate our findings, well before we had carried out any serious or prolonged investigation. 'What would you put down today,' he said, 'as the chief obstacles to the villagers pulling themselves up out of their depression?' 'Monkeys,' we said, 'malaria and mutual mistrust. The monkeys eat the fruit and vegetables, dig up potatoes and destroy sugar cane and other crops. Only the rice is left and that is polished, so there is no vitamin in the village diet, almost no protein, and so no resistance to malaria at harvest time. The result is poverty, indebtedness and then fear of constant oppression by one group of another, until co-operation for any constructive or common end has become almost impossible.'

In those early days, we had thought that my newly gained agricultural science from the U.S.A. would be, of all our tools, the most useful. This was not by any means so,

but the training in observation and in method of approach that I had learned at Cornell was invaluable. Early on we did introduce new breeds of poultry and of cows, new vegetables and some new implements and manures, but we had to learn to look at the villager and his problem as a whole, and to be ready to attack whatever emergency arose.

In extending our approach to more villages it was through medicine and treatment that we found the readiest path to the hearts, affections and so to the confidence of the villagers. Our problem for some months was to find a professional doctor who was willing to reside with us, and who could be counted upon not to despise and insult these simple and sometimes primitive village people. An American lady, Miss Gretchen Green, with considerable knowledge of nursing and first aid, filled the gap for a time and opened our first clinic. Her services proved invaluable, for she too knew no Bengali, and each student in turn had to act for her as interpreter in the clinic at Sriniketan, and, in the village, some member of the staff.

But it was Kalimohan Ghose who, seeing what a powerful lever an economic and practical health service could be in winning the confidence of the villagers, able neither to pay for nor to obtain skilled medical assistance, adapted the method and approach of the Anti-Malarial Co-operative Society of Bengal to the founding of Co-operative Village Health Societies. Most of the households in one village would at last agree to take out membership. The Society could then pay for a resident compounder and for a limited amount of free treatment.

As more villages became interested in our programme, we were driven to explore the simplest and least expensive way of broadening our approach to the boys in each village. We had no money to pay teachers, but we thought that if one of our students could be trained as a Scout Leader, Baden Powell's Scouting system and principles could be adapted for village use. It was Dhirananda Roy and Masoji from Santiniketan, who were sent by Tagore to the Central Provinces for a special course for Scoutmasters. Dhirananda then adapted it, with great imagination, to the needs and problems of the village, so that the first troops of village Brati Balakas were organized, and our other students became Scoutmasters too. Later the girls were included as Balikas. These village boys learned to grow vegetables, put out fires, give first aid, act dramas, sing songs, play games and administer quinine 'until the pill was seen absolutely to have been swallowed.'

Was there opposition? Yes, from many directions at once, but gradually our staff, with our two Japanese carpenter-gardeners, was built up and learned to work together. Problems were brought in from the farm, the village, the clinic and the bank, then as research and survey were set on foot, the results were fed back to the village, or into the education of the village boys, who themselves, in later years, became village headmen.

We soon discovered that many of the traditional craftsmen we met were near starvation. Could they be brought in for special courses in new techniques? Could they get credit and would they co-operate to obtain it? Who would

help over marketing and the trying-out of new designs? Nandalal Bose and his young artists from Kalabhavan early on lent us a hand in this field. The muchis, the lac workers, the weavers, the carpenters, all came to Surul either to train or to work. Slowly workshops for training were set up, and later for production. The difficult problem of orderly marketing was left out, as it so often is, till much too late. How little we knew about it! We thought that goods well made should sell themselves, and did not realize how important it was to study consumer need and preference, and then to perfect every step and link in the chain of production, from source of raw material to finished article.

True to his early and wise advice, Tagore pulled me away in 1923 to give the Indian staff of the young Institute a chance to find its own feet. It was as I travelled with him in Kathiawar, and later in China, Japan, Argentina and Italy, that we discussed so many different aspects of the work. In 1925 he agreed to release me so that I could marry Dorothy Whitney Straight, who had financed the enterprise at Surul from the outset and who continued to do so until 1947. Nothing will illustrate better how deeply Tagore was implicated in Sriniketan than these extracts from his letters:—

13th November 1922. 'You know my heart is with Surul. I feel that it has life in it—it does not deal with abstractions, but has its roots deep in the heart of living reality. You may be absolutely certain that it will be able to weather all storms and spread its branches wide.'

18th April 1923. 'The work in Surul is a work of creation, for in it you are not following some fixed path prescribed

in books, but giving expression to your own creative personality, to which even the opposition of obdurate materials ultimately brings help for shaping the structure.'

25th June 1924. 'I believe I have the power of vision which seeks its realization in some concrete form. Unless our different works in Visva-Bharati are luminous with the fire of vision, I myself can have no place in them. This is why all the time when Sriniketan has been struggling to grow into a form, I was intently wishing that it should not only have a shape, but also light; so that it might transcend its immediate limits of time, space and some special purpose. . . . A lighted lamp is, for us, the end, and not a lump of gold.'

21st October 1926. 'Your spirit will still work in Surul, and I shall always remember you, not merely as a friend, but as a sharer in the intimacy of a conjoint creation. That it was possible for you to come to my side in the very beginning of your life's career was fortunate for me—for the old is old and the young young, and it is very seldom the twain truly meet. But I am sure that we did meet. . . .'

10th July 1930. 'We two were of unequal age, but I was not aware of the difference for a moment, and our companionship was so utterly simple and intimate. I think you are the only one who closely came to know me when I was young and old at the same time.'

Tagore was convinced that a new kind of schooling for village children was essential, but that it must be based on the rich experience already gained. He had in the past encouraged Willie Pearson to start a school for the Santalis in

the Santal village close to Santiniketan, but Pearson was dead. It was to Santose Majumdar that he handed over this project. The first handful of boys were orphans or in charge of local guardians, and when they came they were boarded at Majumdar's own house. They shared in all the tasks of home and garden, as did the earliest children in Tagore's own school.

Our achievements with the village boys and with those of Majumdar's group, led to the establishment of a boarding school, where village children came by the week. It was christened by Tagore, Siksha-Satra. This was set up at Sriniketan, and still continues. It was specially designed for picked boys from sympathetic parents, whose trust had been won by Sriniketan in the neighbouring villages. Tagore and the staff realized that, unless the boys could get away from all the customary claims of home and village for five days in the week, there were definite limits to the progress they could make. The boys were carefully tested in the village, and came from homes where confidence had been won over many months of contact and collaboration. The boys arrived on Monday morning, each with his little sack of rice, enough for five days, and went home on Saturday.

At school they carried out a variety of duties, in dormitory, kitchen, garden, poultry-run and dairy. They learned games, songs and plays, carpentry and some other craft, and their sums and writing were focussed on their daily experience. Out of this training, grew Tagore's idea of an education basic to the needs of any child in a rural society. He would have liked girls also in Siksha-Satra from the start,

but village parents were not then willing to part with them. For reasons that did not seem to him fundamentally sound from an all-round educational point of view, Tagore would allow the introduction of no special study or craft. Many a time he was pressed to include this or that craft or study for what he felt were unsound motives; sentimental, political, sectarian or economic. He would have none of them.

16th December 1937. I wrote to Tagore on Primary Education:—

'Dhiren expressed to me, almost in Rathi's words, his feeling about the importance of primary education in India, and the need to base it on sound teacher training, such as he thought the new training school and Sriniketan, with Santiniketan close by, could give. Especially he feels that you have built an independent vantage ground between the new and the old government forces, which exists nowhere else in India. He would like to devote himself entirely to the Guru Training School, Siksha-Satra and Sriniketan.'

19th December 1937. Tagore wrote:—

'You know how for a long time I have been cherishing my hope of establishing an ideal centre of education at Sriniketan—an ideal which is not curtailed to the strictest measure of a narrow village environment, which is not specially set apart to be doled out as a famine ration, carefully calculated to be just good enough for an emaciated life and a dwarfed mentality. It is well known that the education, which is prevalent in our country, is extremely meagre in the spread of its area and barren in its quality. Unfortunately this is all that is available for us, and the artificial stan-

dard set up is proudly considered as respectable. Outside the *bhadralogue* class, pathetic in their struggle for fixing a university label on their name, there is a vast, obscure multitude who cannot even dream of such a costly ambition. With them we have our best opportunity if we know how to use it. There, and there only, can we be free to offer to our country the best kind of all-round culture, not mutilated by official dictators. I have generally noticed that when the charitably-minded, city-bred politicians talk of education for the village folk, they mean a little left-over in the bottom of their cup, after diluting it copiously. They are callously unmindful of the fact, that the kind and the amount of the food, that is needful for mental nourishment, must not be apportioned differently according to the social status of those that receive it.

'I am therefore all the more keen that Siksha-Satra should justify the ideal I have entrusted to it, and should represent the most important function of Sriniketan, in helping students to the attainment of manhood complete in all its various aspects. Our people need more than anything else a real scientific training, that can inspire in them the courage of experiment and the initiative of mind which we lack as a nation. Sriniketan should be able to provide for its pupils an atmosphere of rational thinking and behaviour, which alone can save them from stupid bigotry and moral cowardliness. I myself attach much more significance to the educational possibilities of Siksha-Satra than to the school and college at Santiniketan, which are every day becoming more and more like so many schools and colleges elsewhere in

this country: borrowed cages that treat the students' minds as captive birds, whose sole human value is judged according to the mechanical repetition of lessons, prescribed by an educational dispensation foreign to the soil. It would indeed give me great joy if Sriniketan could at last make use of its opportunities to realize my dream, and I would welcome Dhiren with his vigorous masterfulness to rouse up Siksha-Satra to a new course of fruitful adventure. In that case not only will he have my blessings, but as much guidance as is possible for me to offer him with the last flicker of my life.'

21st December 1937. Tagore wrote:—

'My path, as you know, lies in the domain of quiet, integral action and thought, my units must be few and small, and I can but face human problems in relation to some basic village or cultural area. So in the midst of world-wide anguish, and with the problems of over three hundred millions staring us in the face, I stick to my work in Santiniketan and Sriniketan, hoping that our efforts will touch the hearts of our village neighbours, and help them in re-asserting themselves in a new social order. If we can give a start to a few villages, they would perhaps be an inspiration to some others—and my life work will have been done.'

Many of those early Siksha-Satra students are the accepted leaders in their villages today.

As our experience of the problems grew, so did our need for specialist help and advice. Early on we engaged and added to the staff a manager for the experimental farm, Santose Bose. Our own dairy farmer, Santose Mitra, was an old Santiniketan-trained boy, a first-class worker and an

artist, too. Our surveyor, Upen Babu, helped our first students to lay out, to build and to thatch with rice straw their own bungalows on their own one-tenth-of-an-acre garden plots. Government trained specialists helped us with lessons to village leather-workers, and taught our own students modern tanning and leather work, as well as durree making and weaving. Dr Harry Timbres, an American Quaker, volunteered to do fundamental research into the life, habits and control of the malarial mosquito. There was no DDT in those days, but year by year the incidence of malaria in the area fell in the face of a well-planned campaign. Later came studies in erosion control, in the planting and protection against goats and cattle of appropriate trees for fuel, as well as for timber.

The struggle to achieve willing co-operation in simple ways, not involving money, was a long one. Faith in co-operative credit or money schemes had been in some measure destroyed before we arrived; so that it was a long time before the capacity for mutual trust developed to a stage where monetary contributions could be pooled and used for a common purpose, such as a health society, a village vermin-proof rice-store, a marketing organization.

So often a direct attack on some problem failed for lack of the basic or pilot research, survey or investigation. Fish cultivation was a case in point. Protein foods were scarce, but there were derelict ponds or tanks in every village. Could they be surveyed, scientifically treated, stocked and managed as a co-operative enterprise? In one village all the owners but one agreed. The method under skilled super-

vision could have been extended over a much wider area, but the local fishery officer, provided by the Government, was given no vehicle or travel allowance; and anyhow he was tied too closely to his desk, filling forms and sending endless paper plans to headquarters, which were never implemented.

Along with the principle of training the boys and girls in ways that won the willing collaboration of the parents, we discovered how sound in principle was the use for demonstration of one home or garden in a village, or of one farm in an area, or of one whole village in a district. Local demonstrations could then be staged by villagers themselves, with some help from outside. This was by far the better and quicker method than the setting up of State, District or Government demonstration farms or plots, and less costly. Trying to prove things on our own farm always aroused the criticism that our means were too ample, or that our conditions must be different. For experiment our farm was important, but for demonstration it was not nearly so effective.

In one village, after some trouble, we found a man ready to try out on his farm the growing of a new vegetable popular in Bolpur market. We supplied plants and instructions. Returning at harvest time, we could find no positive result at all. 'But,' said the villagers, 'why did you choose Mr A? He's always ready to try everything new, but he succeeds with nothing. Had you asked Mr B, our best cultivator in this village, you'd have had very different and positive results.'

Results, notable results, were achieved in a small area and in a few villages. Economic returns were such that the rising

standard of living in the area was very noticeable. New confidence arose among these villagers. They felt able to tackle new things, to defeat pessimism and to achieve results together. But time and again the problems baffled us. Without much more university research on the one hand (whether scientific, economic or sociological), and without more intimate contact between us and Government officials, and between officials and villagers at village level, on the other, there could be no progress over the wider areas around us. We knew we were not equipped with means or men, to tackle them ourselves. When and if we attempted half-measures, both we and the village would get discouraged.

Tagore's idea was always to illustrate basic principles by winning the confidence of a few villages at first. Once the villagers found that they could stand on their own feet, once they had confidence in their power to progress, they were more able to say just when they needed professional guidance, even though we were not always equipped to give it.

The trouble was so often that professional guidance was not available from anywhere, that the basic research had not been done, and that pilot experiments in the application of results had not been carried out. More trained men and women were essential, but when available they were liable to demand the market rate of salary. Tagore's university could not afford to pay such salaries. Nor could his low-paid school and college teachers always see why highly trained specialists were needed, and, if obtained, why they should command higher salaries than Visva-Bharati generally

offered. Over and over again, some cheap compromise was attempted, but this never really worked.

Another major difficulty was that, from 1920 on, the Government machine under the British tended to work with a mechanical routine and on a day-to-day basis, with much form-filling. The idea that Government should take a share in rural development, and show some responsibility for rural welfare, was a new one and not generally accepted in official Secretariats. So many of the rural problems we uncovered needed understanding by officials, who had little or no experience in sitting down with village people in order to get at the root of the trouble. The collection of revenue and the administration of justice, although necessary in themselves, occupied too great a proportion of their main energies.

Universities working for years inside closed walls tend, too, to suspect demands for studies out in the field and for village contacts in areas far beyond their immediate control. Tagore recognized that some half-way house, some kind of rural institute, was needed. It could be attached to a university but not entirely under its academic control; be in intimate touch with the village, yet have its connection with all relevant government agencies, without operating as part of a routine Civil Service machine.

I have tried to indicate how Tagore's ideas and influence inspired and penetrated every corner of the Sriniketan enterprise. But it would be wrong to give the impression that too much of his concern was with the day-to-day problems of an infant institution. Constantly he used to remind us

that our practical achievements, our clean milk, our fresh eggs, our flourishing co-operatives, were all useful means, but still only means, toward the achievement of much greater ends. From the earliest days he would urge us to draw upon all the resources, in music, song, drama and dance, drawing and design, at Santiniketan in order to enrich our lives, to liven our aspirations, to inspire our leisure and to increase our delights in every kind of artistic expression, until we and the cultivators could produce a richness and a wealth of cultural life of our own, and a rejuvenation of those ancient art-forms that still survived, but so tenuously, in the villages around us.

In conclusion I quote from the last letter he ever wrote me of 2nd June 1940: 'I often dream of those days when both of us sailed together great seas and found warm access to the hearts of strangers. . . . History has waited long for a perfect renewal of spirit, through the elimination of short-sighted nationalism. Fresh equipment is needed for the exploration of a further uncharted height for humanity to reach.' A most fitting expression of his faith is in the following words: 'I have come to that age when, in my dreams, I nourish my faith in the last survival value of friendship, of love and of the spirit of co-operation fed by the constant delight of sacrifice. Nations decay and die when they betray their trust—but long live Man.'

A Poet's School

Rabindranath Tagore

FROM QUESTIONS THAT HAVE often been put to me, I have come to feel that the public claims an apology from the poet for having founded a school, as I in my rashness have done. One must admit that the silk-worm which spins and the butterfly that floats on the air represent two different stages of existence, contrary to each other. The silkworm seems to have a cash value credited in its favour somewhere in Nature's accounting department, according to the amount of work it performs. But the butterfly is irresponsible. The significance which it may possess has neither weight nor use and is lightly carried on its pair of dancing wings. Perhaps it pleases someone in the heart of the sunlight, the Lord Treasurer of colours, who has nothing to do with the account book and has a perfect mastery in the great art of wastefulness.

The poet may be compared to that foolish butterfly. He also tries to translate all the festive colours of creation in the vibration of his verses. Then why should he imprison himself in an interminable coil of duty, bringing out some good, tough and fairly respectable result? Why should he make himself accountable to those sane people who would judge

the merit of his produce by the amount of profit it will bring?

I suppose this individual poet's answer would be, that when he brought together a few boys, one sunny day in winter, among the warm shadows of the *sāl* trees, strong, straight and tall, with branches of a dignified moderation, he started to write a poem in a medium not of words.

In these self-conscious days of psycho-analysis clever minds have discovered the secret spring of poetry in some obscure stratum of repressed freedom, in some constant fretfulness of thwarted self-realization. Evidently in this case they were right. The phantom of my long-ago boyhood *did* come to haunt the ruined opportunities of its early beginning; it sought to live in the lives of other boys, to build up its missing paradise, as only children can do with ingredients which may not have any orthodox material, prescribed measure, or standard value.

This brings to my mind the name of another poet of ancient India, Kalidasa—the story of whose life has not been written, but can easily be guessed. Fortunately for the scholars, he has left behind him no clear indication of his birth-place, and thus they have a subject that time has left vacant for an endless variety of disagreement. My scholarship does not pretend to go deep, but I remember having read somewhere that he was born in beautiful Kashmir. Since then I have left off reading discussions about his birth-place for fear of meeting with some learned contradiction equally convincing. Anyhow it is perfectly in the fitness of things that Kalidasa should be born in Kashmir—and I envy him, for I was born in Calcutta.

But psycho-analysis need not be disappointed, for he was banished from there to a city in the plain—and his whole poem of *Meghaduta* reverberates with the music of a sorrow that had its crown of suffering 'in remembering happier things.' Is it not significant that in this poem, the lover's errant fancy, in its quest of the beloved who dwelt in the paradise of eternal beauty, lingered with a deliberate delay of enjoyment round every hill, stream, or forest over which it passed; watched the grateful dark eyes of the peasant girls welcoming the rain-laden clouds of June; listened to some village elder reciting under the banyan tree a well-known love legend that ever remained fresh with the tears and smiles of generations of simple hearts? Do we not feel in all this the prisoner of the stony-hearted city revelling in a vision of joy that, in his imaginary journey, followed him from hill to hill, waited at every turn of the path which bore the finger-posts to a heaven for separated lovers banished on the earth?

It was not a physical home-sickness from which the poet suffered, it was something far more fundamental—a home-sickness of the soul. We feel in almost all his works the oppressive atmosphere of the King's palaces of those days, impervious with things of luxury, thick with the callousness of self-indulgence, albeit an atmosphere of refined culture, of an extravagant civilization.

The poet in the royal court lived in banishment—banishment from the immediate presence of the eternal. He knew, it was not merely his own banishment, but that of the whole age to which he was born, the age that had gathered its wealth and missed its well-being, built its storehouse of

things and lost its background of the great universe. What was the form in which his desire for perfection persistently appeared in his drama and poems? It was in that of the *tapovana*, the forest dwelling of the patriarchal community of ancient India. Those who are familiar with Sanskrit literature well know that this was not a colony of people with a primitive culture and mind. They were seekers of truth, for the sake of which they lived in an atmosphere of purity, but not of Puritanism; of the simple life, but not the life of self-mortification. They did not advocate celibacy and they had constant inter-communication with the other people who had to live the life of worldly interest. Their aim and endeavour have briefly been suggested in the *Upanishad* in these lines:

Te sarvagam sarvatah prápya dhîrá
yuktátmánah sarvamevávisanti.

Those men of serene mind enter into the All, having realized and being everywhere in union with the omnipresent Spirit.

It was never a philosophy of renunciation of a negative character, but of a realization completely comprehensive. However, the tortured mind of Kalidasa, in the prosperous city of Ujjaini and the glorious period of Vikramditya, closely pressed by all-obstructing things and all-devouring *self*, made his thoughts hover round the vision of *tapovana* for his inspiration of life, light and freedom.

It was not a deliberate copy, but a natural coincidence, that a poet of modern India also had a similar vision when he felt within him the misery of a spiritual banishment. In the time of Kalidasa the people vividly believed in the ideal

of *tapovana*, the forest colony, and there can be no doubt that even in that late age there were communities of men living in the heart of nature, not ascetics fiercely in love with a lingering suicide, but men of serene sanity who sought to realize the spiritual meaning of their life. And therefore when Kalidasa sang of the *tapovana*, his poems found their immediate communion in the living faith of his hearers. But today the idea of the *tapovana* has lost any definite outline of reality, and has retreated into the far-away phantom land of legend, therefore, in a modern poem, it would merely be poetical, its meaning judged by a literary standard or appraisement. Then again, the spirit of the *tapovana* in the purity of its original shape would be a fantastic anachronism in the present age. Therefore, in order to be real, it must find its reincarnation under modern conditions of life, and be the same in truth, not merely identical in fact. It was this which made the modern poet's heart crave to compose his poem in a tangible language.

But I must give the history in some detail.

Civilized man has come far away from the orbit of his normal life. He has gradually formed and intensified some habits, that are like those of the bees, for adapting himself to his hive-world. We so often see modern men suffering from *ennui*, from world-weariness, from a spirit of rebellion against their environment for no reasonable cause whatever. Social revolutions are constantly ushered in with a suicidal violence that has its origins in our dissatisfaction with our hive-wall arrangement—the too exclusive enclosure that deprives us of the perspective, which is so much needed to give

us the proper proportion in our art of living. All this is an indication that man has not really been moulded in the model of the bee, and therefore he becomes recklessly anti-social when his freedom to be more than social is ignored.

Under our highly complex modern conditions, mechanical forces are organized with such efficiency that the materials produced grow far in advance of man's selective and assimilative capacity to simplify them into harmony with his nature and needs. Such an intemperate overgrowth of things, like the rank vegetation of the tropics, creates confinement for man. The nest is simple, it has an easy relationship with the sky; the cage is complex and costly, it is too much itself, excommunicating whatever lies outside. And modern man is busy building his cage, fast developing his parasitism on the monster, *Thing*, which he allows to envelop him on all sides. He is always occupied in adapting himself to its dead angularities, limits himself to its limitations, and merely becomes a part of it.

This talk of mine may seem too oriental to some of my hearers who, I am told, believe that a constant high pressure of living, produced by an artificially cultivated hunger for things, generates and feeds the energy that drives civilization upon its endless journey. Personally, I do not believe that this has ever been the principal driving force, leading to its eminence any great civilization of which we know in history. But I have broached this subject not for a full discussion, but to explain the conduct of a poet who has trespassed into a domain generally reserved for the expert and for those who have academic distinction.

I was born in what was then the metropolis of British India. My ancestors came floating to Calcutta upon the earliest tide of the fluctuating fortune of the East India Company. The conventional code of life for our family thereupon became a confluence of three cultures: the Hindu, the Mahomedan and the British. My grandfather belonged to that period when an amplitude of dress and courtesy and a generous leisure were gradually being clipped and curtailed into Victorian manners, economical in time, in ceremonies and in the dignity of personal appearance. This will show that I came to a world, in which the modern city-bred spirit of progress had just begun driving its triumphal car over the luscious green life of our ancient village community.

Though the trampling process was almost complete around me, yet the wailing cry of the past was still lingering over the wreckage. I had often listened to my eldest brother describing with the poignancy of a hopeless regret a society hospitable, sweet with the old-world aroma of natural kindliness, full of a simple faith and the ceremonial poetry of life. But all this was a vanishing shadow behind me in the golden haze of a twilight horizon—the all-pervading fact around my boyhood being the modern city, newly built by a Company of Western traders, and the spirit of the modern time seeking its unaccustomed path into our life, stumbling against countless anomalies. But it always is a surprise to me to think that though this closed-up hardness of a city was my only experience of the world, yet my mind was constantly haunted by the home-sick fancies of an exile.

It seems that the sub-conscious remembrance of some primeval dwelling-place (where in our ancestors' minds were figured and voiced the mysteries of the inarticulate rocks, the rushing water and the dark whispers of the forest) was constantly stirring my blood with its call. Some shadow-haunted living reminiscence in me seemed to ache for the pre-natal cradle and playground it once shared with the primal life in the illimitable magic of land, water and air. The thin, shrill cry of the high-flying-kite in the blazing sun of a dazed Indian midday sent to a solitary boy the signal of a dumb distant kinship. The few cocoanut palms growing by the boundary wall of our house, like some war captives from an older army of invaders of this earth, spoke to me of the eternal companionship which the great brotherhood of trees has ever offered to man. They made my heart wistful with the invitation of the forest. I had the good fortune to answer this invitation in person a few years later when, a boy of ten, I stood alone on the Himalayas under the shade of great *deodars*, awed by the dark dignity of life's first-born aristocracy, by a fortitude that was terrible as well as courteous.

Looking back upon those moments of my boyhood days, when my mind seemed to float poised upon a large feeling of the sky, of the light, and to mingle with the brown earth in its glistening grass, I cannot help believing that my Indian ancestry had left deep in my being the legacy of its philosophy: the philosophy which speaks of fulfillment through a harmony with all things. For good or for evil such a harmony has the effect of arousing a great desire in us to seek our freedom, not in the man-made world but in the depth

of the universe, and makes us offer our reverence to the divinity inherent in fire, water and trees, in everything moving and growing. The founding of my school had its origin in the memory of that longing for freedom, the memory which seems to go back beyond the sky-line of my birth.

Freedom in the mere sense of independence has no content, and therefore no meaning. Perfect freedom lies in the perfect harmony of relationship which we realize in this world—not through our response to it in *knowing* but in *being*. Objects of knowledge maintain an infinite distance from us who are the knowers. For knowledge is not union. Therefore the farther world of freedom awaits us where we reach truth, not through feeling it by our senses, or knowing it by reason, but through the union of perfect sympathy.

Children with the freshness of their senses come directly to an intimacy with this world. This is the first great gift they have. They must accept it naked and simple, and must never again lose their power of immediate communication with it. For our perfection we have to be vitally savage and mentally civilized: we should have the gift to be natural with Nature and human with human society. The misery which I felt was due to the crowded solitude in which I dwelt in a city where man was everywhere, with never a gap for the immense non-human. My banished soul sitting in the civilized isolation of town-life cried within me for the enlargement of the horizon of its comprehension. I was like the torn-away line of a verse, always in a state of suspense,while the other line, with which it rhymed and which could give it fullness, was smudged away into some misty, undecipherable

distance. The inexpensive power to be happy which, along with other children, I brought with me to this world, was being constantly worn away by friction with the brick-and-mortar arrangement of life, by mechanical habit and a code of customary respectability.

In the usual course I was sent to school, but possibly my suffering was unusual, greater than that of most other children. The non-civilized in me was sensitive: it had a great thirst for colour, for music, for the movement of life. Our city-built education took no heed of that living fact. It had its luggage-van waiting for branded bales of marketable result. The relative proportion of the non-civilized and civilized in man should be in the proportion of water and land on our globe, the former predominating. But the school had for its object a continual reclamation of the non-civilized. Such a drain of the fluid element causes an aridity which may not be considered deplorable under city conditions. But my nature never got accustomed to those conditions, to the callous decency of the pavement. The non-civilized triumphed in me only too soon and drove me away from my school when I had just entered my teens. I found myself stranded on a solitary island of ignorance, and had to rely solely upon my own instincts to build up an education for myself from the very beginning.

This reminds me that when I was young I had the great good fortune to come upon a Bengali translation of Robinson Crusoe. I still believe that this is one of the best books for boys that has ever been written. I have already spoken in this paper about my longing when young to run away from

my own self and be one with everything in Nature. I have described this mood as particularly Indian, the outcome of a traditional desire for the expansion of consciousness. One has to admit that such a desire is too subjective in its character, but this is inevitable in our geographical circumstances. We live under the extortionate tyranny of the tropics, paying heavy toll every moment for the barest right of existence. The heat, the damp, the unspeakable fecundity of minute life feeding upon big life, the perpetual sources of irritation, visible and invisible, leave very little margin of capital for extravagant experiments.

Excess of energy seeks obstacles for its self-realization. That is why we find so often in Western literature a constant emphasis upon the malignant aspect of Nature, in whom the people of the West seem to delight to discover an enemy for the sheer enjoyment of challenging her to fight. The reason which made Alexander express his desire to find other worlds to conquer when his conquest in this world was completed, makes these enormously vital people desire, when they have some respite in their sublime mission of fighting against objects that are noxious, to go out of their way to spread their coat-tails in other peoples' thoroughfares and to claim indemnity when these are trodden upon. In order to take the thrilling risk of hurting themselves they are ready to welcome endless trouble to hurt others who are inoffensive, the beautiful birds which happen to know how to fly away, the timid beasts which have the advantage of inhabiting inaccessible regions, and—but I avoid the discourtesy of mentioning higher races in this connection.

Life's fulfilment finds constant contradictions in its path, but these are necessary for the sake of its advance. The stream is saved from the sluggishness of its current by the perpetual opposition of the soil through which it must cut its way and which forms its banks. The spirit of fight belongs to the genius of life. The tuning of an instrument has to be done, not because it reveals a proficient perseverance in the face of difficulty, but because it helps music to be perfectly realized. Let us rejoice that, in the West, life's instrument is being tuned in all its different chords, owing to the great fact that the West has a triumphant pleasure in its struggle of contest with obstacles. The spirit of creation in the heart of the universe will never allow, for its own sake, obstacles to be completely removed. It is only because positive truth lies in that ideal of perfection, which has to be won by our own endeavour in order to make it our own, that the spirit of fight is great, and not in the exhibition of a muscular athleticism or the rude barbarism of a ravenous rapacity.

In Robinson Crusoe, the delight of the union with Nature finds its expression in a story of adventure in which the solitary man is face to face with solitary Nature, coaxing her, co-operating with her, exploring her secrets, using all his faculties to win her help. The joy I felt in reading this book was not in sharing the pride of a human success against the closed fist of a parsimonious Nature, but in the active realization of harmony with her through intelligently determined dealings, the natural conclusion of which was success. And this is the heroic love-adventure of the West, the active wooing of the earth.

I remember how in my youth the feeling of intense delight and wonder once followed me in my railway journey across Europe from Brindisi to Calais, when I realized the vast beauty of this continent everywhere blossoming in a glow of health and richness under the age-long attention of her chivalrous lover, Western humanity. He had gained her, made her his own, unlocked the inexhaustible generosity of her heart. And I had intently wished that the introspective vision of the universal soul, which an Eastern devotee realizes in the solitude of his mind, could be united with this spirit of outward expression in service, the exercise of will in unfolding the wealth of beauty and well-being from its shy obscurity to the light.

I remember the morning when a beggar woman in a Bengal village gathered in the loose end of her *sari* the stale flowers that were about to be thrown away from the vase on my table: and with an ecstatic expression of tenderness she buried her face in them, exclaiming 'Ah, Beloved of my Heart!' Her eyes could easily pierce the veil of the outward form and reach the realm of the infinite in these flowers where she found the intimate touch of her Beloved. But in spite of it all she lacked that energy of worship, the Western form of direct divine service which helps the earth to bring out her flowers and to spread the reign of beauty on the desolate dust. I refuse to think that the twin spirits of the East and the West, the Mary and Martha, can never meet to make perfect the realization of truth. In spite of our material poverty and the antagonism of time I wait patiently for this meeting.

Robinson Crusoe's island comes to my mind when I think of an institution, where the first great lesson in the perfect union of man and Nature, not only through love but through active communication, can be had unobstructed. We have to keep in mind the fact that love and action are the only media through which perfect knowledge can be obtained, for the object of knowledge is not pedantry but wisdom. The primary object of an institution of this kind should not merely be to educate one's limbs and mind to be in efficient readiness for all emergencies, but to be in perfect tune in the symphony of response between life and world, to find the balance of their harmony which is wisdom. The first important lesson for children in such a place would be that of improvization, the constant imposition of the ready-made having been banished therefrom in order to give constant occasions to explore one's capacity through surprises of achievement. I must make it plain that this means a lesson not in simple life, but in creative life. For life may grow complex, and yet if there is a living personality in its centre, it will still have the unity of creation, it will carry its own weight in perfect grace, and will not be a mere addition to the number of facts that only go to swell a crowd.

I wish I could say that we have fully realized my dream in our school. We have only made the first introduction towards it and have given an opportunity to the children to find their freedom in Nature by being able to love it. For love is freedom: it gives us that fullness of existence which saves us from paying with our soul for objects that are immensely cheap. Love lights up this world with its mean-

ing and makes life feel that it has everywhere that *enough* which truly is its feast. I know men who preach the cult of simple life by glorifying the spiritual merit of poverty. I refuse to imagine any special value in poverty when it is a mere negation. Only when the mind has the sensitiveness to be able to respond to the deeper call of reality, is it naturally weaned away from the lure of the fictitious value of things. It is callousness which robs us of our simple power to enjoy, and dooms us to the indignity of snobbish pride in furniture and the foolish burden of expensive things. But to pit the callousness of asceticism against the callousness of luxury is merely fighting one evil with the help of another, inviting the pitiless demon of the desert in place of the indiscriminate demon of the jungle.

I tried my best to develop in the children of my school the freshness of their feeling for Nature, a sensitiveness of soul in their relationship with their human surroundings, with the help of literature, festive ceremonials and also the religious teaching which enjoins us to come to the nearer presence of the world through the soul, thus to gain it more than can be measured—like gaining an instrument, not merely by having it, but by producing music upon it. I prepared for my children a real home-coming into this world. Among other subjects learnt in the open air under the shade of trees they had their music and picture-making; they had their dramatic performances, activities that were the expressions of life.

But as I have already hinted this was not sufficient, and I waited for men and the means to be able to introduce into

our school an active vigour of work, the joyous exercise of our inventive and constructive energies that help to build up character and by their constant movements naturally sweep away all accumulations of dirt, decay and death. In other words I always felt the need of the Western genius for imparting to my educational ideal that strength of reality which knows how to clear the path towards a definite end of practical good.

For me the obstacles were numerous. The tradition of the community which calls itself educated, the parents' expectations, the up-bringing of the teachers themselves, the claim and the constitution of the official University, were all overwhelmingly arrayed against the idea I had cherished. In addition to this, our funds which had all but failed to attract contribution from my countrymen were hardly adequate to support an institution in which the number of boys must necessarily be small.

Fortunately help came to us from an English friend who took the leading part in creating and guiding the rural organization work connected with the Visva-Bharati. He believes, as I do, in an education which takes count of the organic wholeness of human individuality that needs for its health a general stimulation to all its faculties, bodily and mental. In order to have the freedom to give effect to this idea we started our work with a few boys, who either were orphans or whose parents were too destitute to be able to send them to any school whatever.

Before long we discovered that minds actively engaged in a round of constructive work fast developed energies

which sought eager outlets in the pursuit of knowledge, even in undertaking extra tasks for such a mechanical result as the perfecting of hand-writing. The minds of these boys became so alive to all passing events that a very simple fact made them at once realize the advantage of learning English, which was not in their programme. The suggestion came to them one day while posting their letters, as they watched the post-master writing on their envelopes in English the addresses that had already been written in Bengali. Immediately they went to their teacher claiming to be taught English in an additional hour and, what is still more amazing, these brave boys do not yet repent of their rashness in this choice of their lesson. Do not I remember to this day what violently criminal thoughts possessed my infant mind, when my own teacher of English made his appearance at the bend of the lane leading to our house?

For these boys vacation has no meaning. Their studies, though strenuous, are not a task, being permeated by a holiday spirit which takes shape in activities in their kitchen, their vegetable garden, their weaving, their work of small repairs. It is because their class-work has not been wrenched away and walled-in from their normal vocation, because it has been made a part of their daily current of life, that it easily carries itself by its own onward flow.

Most of our boys when they first came were weak in the body and weak in mind: the ravages that malaria and other tropical diseases had made in them, through generations of fated inheritance, had left them like a field devastated by years of savage warfare which had turned the soil into anaemic

barrenness. They brought with them an intolerable mental perversity, the outcome of vitiated blood and a starved physical constitution. The Brahmin was supercilious, the non-Brahmin pitiable in his shrinking self-abasement. They hated to do any work of common good lest others besides themselves should get the least advantage. They sulked because they were asked to do for their own benefit the kind of work that, according to their idea of fitness, should be done by an ordinary *coolie* or by a paid cook. They were not ashamed of living upon charity but were ashamed of self-help. Possibly they thought it unjust that we should gain the merit and that they should pay at least a part of the cost.

It might have been thought that this meanness and selfish jealousy, this moral lethargy revealed in the utter want of beneficence in them, were inherent in their nature. But within a very short time all these have been changed. The spirit of sacrifice and comradeship, the disinterested desire to help others, which these boys have developed, are rare even in children who have had better opportunities. It was the active healthy life which brought out in a remarkably quick time all that was good in them, and the accumulated rubbish of impurities was swept off. The daily work which they were doing brought before them moral problems in the concrete shape of difficulties, and claimed solutions from them. The logic of facts showed to them the reality of moral principles in life, and now they feel astonished at instances when other boys do not understand it. They take the utmost delight in cooking, weaving, gardening, improving their surroundings, rendering services to other boys, very often

secretly, lest they should feel embarrassed. In ordinary messing organizations members generally clamour for more than is provided to them, but these boys willingly simplify their needs, patiently understand the inevitableness of imperfections. They are made to realize that the responsibility is mostly theirs, and every luxury becomes a burden when a great part of its pressure is not upon other people's shoulders. Therefore instead of idly grumbling at deficiencies they have to think and manage for themselves. To improve their dietary they must put extra zest into their vegetable growing. They have tools and their mother wit for their small needs, and though their endeavour is sure to have crude results yet these have a value which exceeds all market prices.

I wish, for the sake of giving an artistic touch of disarray to my description, I could speak of some break-down in our plan, of some unexpected element of misfit trying to wreck the symmetry of our arrangement. But, in the name of truth, I have to confess that it has not yet happened. Possibly our tropical climate is accountable for this dull calm in our atmosphere, wherefor that excess of energy may be lacking in our boys, which often loves to make a mess of things that are tiresomely pointed out as worthy of protection, like the beautiful peacock pointed out by Indian villagers to the Western lovers of sport. Possibly it is not even too late to hope that this newly built experiment of ours is not going to be too tame a copy of a model paradise for harmless boys. I am sure, before long, some incalculable problems of life will make their appearance to challenge our theories and to try our faith in our ideal with rude contradictions.

In the meanwhile, having realized that this daily practice in the adaptation of mind and body to life's necessities has made these boys intellectually alert, we have at last mustered courage to extend this system to the primary section of our school, which is furthest away from the military frontier of our University. The children of this section, under an ideal teacher who realizes that to teach is to learn, have just finished constructing their first hut of which they are absurdly proud. I can see from their manner, they have dimly begun to think that education is a permanent part of the adventure of life, that it is not like a painful hospital treatment for curing them of the congenital malady of their ignorance, but is a function of health, the natural expression of their mind's vitality. Thus, I have just had the good fortune to watch the first shoot of life peeping out in a humble corner of our organization. My idea is to allow this climber to grow up, with no special label of learned nomenclature attached to it; grow up till it completely hides the dead pole that bears no natural flower or fruit, but flourishes the parchment flag of examination success.

Before I stop I must say a few more words about a most important item of educational endeavour.

Children have their active sub-conscious mind which, like the tree, has the power to gather its food from the surrounding atmosphere. For them the atmosphere is a great deal more important than rules and methods, building appliances, class teachings and text books. The earth has her mass of substance in her land and water. But, if I may be allowed figurative language, she finds her inspiration of freedom, the

stimulation of her life, from her atmosphere. It is, as it were, the envelopment of her perpetual education. It brings from her depth responses in colours and perfume, music and movement, her incessant self-revelation, continual wonders of the unexpected. In his society man has the diffuse atmosphere of culture always about himself. It has the effect of keeping his mind sensitive to his racial inheritance, to the current of influences that come from tradition; it makes it easy for him unconsciously to imbibe the concentrated wisdom of ages. But in our educational organizations we behave like miners, digging only for things substantial, through a laborious process of mechanical toil: and not like a tiller of the soil, whose work is in a perfect collaboration with Nature, in a passive relationship of sympathy with the atmosphere.

However, I tried to create an atmosphere in my institution, giving it the principal place in our programme of teaching. For atmosphere there must be for developing the sensitiveness of soul, for affording mind its true freedom of sympathy. Apathy and ignorance are the worst forms of bondage for man; they are the invisible walls of confinement that we carry round us when we are in their grip. In educational organizations our reasoning faculties have to be nourished in order to allow our mind its freedom in the world of truth, our imagination for the world which belongs to art, and our sympathy for the world of human relationship. This last is even more important than learning the geography of foreign lands.

The minds of children of to-day are almost deliberately made incapable of understanding other people with different languages and customs. This causes us, when our growing souls demand it, to grope after each other in darkness, to hurt each other in ignorance, to suffer from the worst form of the blindness of this age. The Christian missionaries themselves have contributed to this cultivation of insensitiveness and contempt for alien races and civilization. In the name of brotherhood and in the blindness of sectarian pride they create misunderstanding. This they make permanent in their text books and thereby poison the susceptible minds of the young. I have tried to save our children from such a mutilation of natural human love with the help of friends from the West, who, with their sympathetic understanding, have done us the greatest service.

Siksha-Satra

L.K. Elmhirst

THE SIKSHA-SATRA IS THE NATURAL outcome of some years of educational experiment at Santiniketan and of two years experience at the Institute of Rural Reconstruction at Sriniketan. The principles upon which it is based are little more than common sense deductions from the failures and successes of the past.

It is in their simplicity, in their capacity to grow, and in a certain native frankness that the charm of children chiefly lies. Untrammelled by tradition, driven forward by inherent instinct, they carry on their own research in the field of life, gathering knowledge from experience with an abounding joy that is rarely exceeded later.

With the young of domestic animals we notice in its simplest form this care-free exuberance, this capacity to treat life as a perpetual game and the world as a fairy make-believe, in which, for the kitten everything that moves is a potential mouse, and for the puppy no household article comes amiss so long as in the softness of its nature it may represent some rat to be worried. There exists apparently some driving force within, impelling growth along certain lines, yet ever seeking to direct the arduous gathering of

experience towards self-preservation, with an overflow of life-energy in what seems to the adult to be the reckless joy-ride of youth.

With the growing tree, too, there is the same kind of exuberance in the joyful pushing upward of the young shoot. Such is the whirl of life packed within the tip of this first tender outgrowth, that cell is added to cell with an amazing rapidity whilst the food supply that has been packed away in the mother seed remains unexhausted. Even when this supply is gone, the growing point still finds its own natural way up and out into the open air, and woe be to the tree of the future if some accident befalls and damage is done to that first shoot. Other branches may develop and try to replace the lead that has gone, but some driving force, some urgent desire to seek for life and growth will have gone too.

There is something of this quality in the human child, and in the same way it is not difficult to inflict upon the child, as on the young tree, or upon the young animal, permanent damage by means of unnatural repression. The playtime of young life is not an unmeaning thing. It is intimately associated with the demands of a strenuous future, even though for the time being some of the worries of self-preservation may be borne by the parent.

We are apt to forget this with our children. We prefer to provide them with a children's toy-world, lacking the imagination to remember that, even if it was make-believe, it was always a grown-up world that we chiefly craved as the plaything of our early days. To dig our own cave in the earth, where we could creep out of sight, much to the dis-

gust of the matter-of-fact gardener, to chop sticks with a real axe, to be given a pair of boots to polish, a fire to light, or some dough to knead and bake—these were ever our keenest joys; yet only too often had we to be content with toy bricks, toy houses, toy tools or toy kitchens; or, if serious work was provided, it was in the nature of sweated labour, which fatigued without giving play to our creative instincts.

The aim, then, of the Siksha-Satra is, through experience in dealing with this overflowing abundance of child life, its charm and its simplicity, to provide the utmost liberty within surroundings that are filled with creative possibilities, with opportunities for the joy of play that is work—the work of exploration, and of work that is play—the reaping of a succession of novel experiences; to give the child that freedom of growth which the young tree demands for its tender shoot, that field for self-expansion in which all young life finds both training and happiness.

It is between the ages of six and twelve that the growing child is most absorbed in gathering impressions through sight, smell, hearing and taste, but more especially through touch and the use of the hands. From the start, therefore, the child enters the Siksha-Satra as an apprentice in handicraft as well as housecraft. In the workshop, as a trained producer and as a potential creator, it will acquire skill and win freedom for its hands; whilst as an inmate of the house, which it helps to construct and furnish and maintain, it will gain expanse of spirit and win freedom as a citizen of the small community.

Only after it has stored up a certain amount of experience in these different fields will the child begin to feel a need for their co-ordination, and therefore for the time to record, to relate, to dramatize and to synthesize the discoveries of the senses. Until the child has had intimate touch with the facts and demands of life, it is surely unfair to demand long hours of concentrated attention upon second-hand facts and figures, wholly unconnected with anything it has hitherto encountered and taken note of in real Life.

There is a certain Farm School in the Philippine Islands where some three hundred young boys work their own little holdings, build their own cottages, keep their own accounts, run their own municipality, tend their own live-stock, and pocket their own profits. 'All of our classroom work is in the nature of round-table discussions of stored-up experience, except the teaching of English,' said the Principal; 'and because we are using a standardized course wholly unrelated to their own life, their English classes are lifeless too, and I cannot arouse interest in them.'

Under the term housecraft, at the Siksha-Satra, the following functions will be treated as of primary educational importance:—

Care and cleaning and construction of quarters.
Care and proper use of latrines; sanitary disposal of waste.
Cooking and serving of food; clothes washing and repair.
Personal hygiene and healthy habits.
Individual self-discipline; group self-government.
Policing and hospitality; fire drill and control.

In everyone of these, there is some art to be mastered, some business or organizing capacity to be developed, some

law of science to be recognized, and in all of them there is a call for the recognition of the need for individual self-preservation as well as of the duties, responsibilities and privileges of family membership and citizenship.

Much of what is termed housecraft is in the nature of handicraft, but, from the earliest years, it is well to introduce to the children some special craft, easily grasped by small hands, which is of definite economic value. The product should be of real use in the home, or have a ready sale outside, and thus enable the child to realize his capacity for self-preservation through the trained experience of his hands.

Any of the following can easily be mastered in a few weeks:

Cotton wick, tape and band making; scarf weaving and belt making; cotton rug and durree making (the looms can easily be made by the children themselves, out of bamboo).

Straw-sandal making. Straw-mat and mattress making.

Sewing; paper making; ink making.

Dyeing with simple vegetable dyes; cotton and calico printing with wood blocks.

Making sun-dried mud bricks.

For elder boys and girls the following are suitable:

Wool work, shearing, washing, carding, dyeing and coarse blanket weaving; knitting, darning.

Pottery, carpentry and carving, smithy and tool making.

Building with sun-dried bricks; rush and mud construction, bamboo construction; thatching.

Tailoring and use of sewing machine.

Watch and clock repair.

Cycle cleaning and repair.

Block making, typesetting, printing, typing and duplicating.

Musical instrument making; drums, flutes, one-stringed instruments.
Food preparation; wheat and grain grinding; oil extraction; sap extraction; soap making.

In the carrying out of every one of these crafts, again, some art, some science, some element of business enters in. Any one of these crafts may offer an avenue of approach to the ultimate high road of self-preservation, and to self-confidence in his or her own capacity to achieve economic stability in the future. Without such feeling of confidence in the power to face the fight for livelihood, through the skill of trained fingers and hands, it is impossible to achieve that freedom of spirit upon which the fullest enjoyment of life is dependent.

There are few of the crafts mentioned above which are not in some way intimately bound up with the life of the country-folk. With each of them there is a grammar of procedure which has to be learned, but it is a grammar which is not detached from life and which has to be learned at the beginning by trial and error and the bitterness of failure. There are always dry bones of some kind behind the finished product of any skilled craft; and so often, especially in the class-room, is the original product forgotten together with the atmosphere which gave rise to it, and only these dry bones left.

Of all workshops the one provided by Nature herself is the most commodious and helpful. Under skilled stimulation and guidance there is out-of-doors an unlimited field for experiencing and for experimenting with life. The schoolmaster here is an anachronism. He can no longer

tower over his pupils from his rostrum and threaten them with his power to grant or withhold marks and certificates. He is forced to adopt his rightful place behind the student, ever on the watch, ever ready with a word of advice or encouragement, ever ready to be a student himself, but never in the way. Nature herself is the best schoolmaster and rewards the student according to his capacity and powers of observation. The teacher fails here when his student fails, and can no longer lay the failure of his pupil at the door of some inherent incapacity.

The following out-door crafts can be learned and practised by small children, and yet be of economic benefit and have their intimate contact with life, their definite utility to the family or group:

Poultry-keeping, and chicken-rearing for egg-production.
Care of fuel and water-supply.
Seed-bed preparation, manuring, and planting.
Cultivation of flowers and vegetables.
Drainage and irrigation; wood-cutting and jungle-clearing.

As the capacity of the child grows and his experience enlarges, there will come at a later stage a natural demand for that grammar of his art upon which depends more accurate observation, more precise inference, more fruitful knowledge, as well as a desire for communion with fellow-workers in the same field whose experiences and thoughts, whose struggles and approach are stored up in books—not in such case task-books to drudge over, but helpmates and friends carrying them out into newer and wider fields of human knowledge.

Already the Indian village boy is accustomed to take his part in the duties and privileges of family life, the herding of the cows, the watering and feeding of them. The inclusion of a small garden within his home compound, properly supervised, provides an ample basis for the widest and best form of education by experience. So in the Siksha-Satra it is the individual plot of ground, which will be for both boys and girls the basis of much of their reading, of their writing and of most of their arithmetic.

From the first the child should feel that this plot is playground as well as experimental farm, where it will try its own experiments as well as carry out the planting, tending and harvesting of some definitely profitable crop. Under such a system, text books, class-room and formal laboratory go by the board. There remain the garden plot, the potting shed, and the workshop. Records are kept and reports and accounts written up, revised and corrected, giving scope for *literary training* in its most interesting form. *Geology* becomes the study of the fertility of the plot; *chemistry* the use of lime and manures of all kinds, of sprays and disinfectants; *physics* the use of tools, of pumps, the study of water-lifts and oil-engines; *entomology* the control of plant pests (ants, caterpillars, beetles) and diseases (leaf curl, wilt and bacterial attacks); *ornithology* the study of birds in their relation, first to the garden plot and then to the world in general.

There is no room in the Siksha-Satra for Nature-Study as an abstract subject, divorced from life and the needs of life by Boards of Education, which sit in cities and recommend questionnaires and examinations to suit their prescribed text

books, with rewards to suit the examination results. In life the child has to face the mosquito nightly, perhaps the bug, or the flea, the bacteria of typhoid, of cholera and small-pox, as well as the forces of Nature which attack his trees, his plants and his live stock. Nature study is thus transformed into the study of Nature in relation to life and the daily experiences of life.

Almost unwittingly we have wandered into the field of human service and of citizenship, with its privileges and its responsibility for human welfare. By a little practical training and experience, seventy-five per cent. of the ill-health of the rural Indian could be eliminated within a few months through the activity of the children. Such is their willingness to absorb by experience, to experiment and to learn from hard facts, that the children become the natural and immediate agents in the education of the adults who, by the very responsibilities of their position as bread-winners or house-workers, are precluded from launching out into a world of adventure in experiment, and who have in all probability lost, through years of struggle and drudgery, that initial equipment without which experiment is impossible—a fruitful imagination.

It is in fact, through the children in our own neighbourhood, that new life and hope have flooded the villages, which have been lost for two generations past in a slough of despair. We left the village pundit to carry on his drilling in the three R's, the pupils chained to unnatural benches, and at the mercy of his jailor's arm. They needed first aid, and with that we gained the trust of the parents: the boys revelled

with us in our simple games and thus their own devotion was won.

Out of the fruitless attempt of the unorganized adults to stem a village fire, came the training of the boys as a Fire Brigade and with it drill, discipline and a sense of the utility of immediate obedience to a leader in case of emergency. Ninety per cent. of the village was attacked with malaria, but through this need of life came the mapping of the village, its tanks, its dwellings, its pits and its drains, and then the digging of water channels—geography in fact with a vengeance. Not chemistry, not zoology, not bacteriology, not physiology—but the study of Anopheles, the kerosining of tanks, the disinfection of wells, the registration of fever cases and the keeping of health records.

There was a local fair to be policed without cost, and our boys, many of them not more than children, took over the responsibility. There were latrines to be dug and visited regularly, carts to be parked, the water reservoir to be guarded and the whole area to be cleaned up every morning. There were calls for first aid, for sympathy and kindliness, for observation and watchfulness, and in the supervisor for perpetual attention, for keeping himself in the background, for stimulation and encouragement. Out of this grew a movement of the young men in the neighbourhood to take over the responsibility for the watch and ward of their own village, so that funds might be obtained for more and more ambitious experiments in the realms of health, education and civic enterprise.

Lack of fresh vegetables and the insanitary wastage of

manure, opened the way for home gardening and the initiation of small garden plots within the home courtyard. Attempts to introduce new crops among the adults had failed because only the worst farmers, who could not succeed anyhow, toyed with the novelties held out to them, whilst the best farmers waited to watch the results. On the other hand, if the boys failed, the parents did not take it seriously because, after all, they were boys. If they succeeded there was a tendency to follow their example. Through such avenues a road to new health, new life, and a new freedom has been opened, and this by the children themselves.

From the workshop to the garden, from the garden to the field and the farm, and from the farm into the neighbourhood, and so through the Excursion, the Pilgrimage and the Camping Trip, out into the wider field of life. Here for instance, within but two miles of us, are all kinds of activities going on, intimately related to our daily existence, which we tend to take for granted and therefore to leave out of our educational programme:

The Post Office and Telegraph system.
The Police Station, and local Gaol.
The Law Court, and Local Dispensary.
The Station and Goods Yard.
The Rice and Oil Mills. The Brick Yard.
The Smithy and Wheelwright.
The Carpentry and Timber-yard.
The Potter, the Copper-smith and the Brass-smith.
The Home Weaving Industry.
The Watchmaker and Jeweller.
The Shoemaker and the Tailor.

In each of these there is an art, a science and some element of business. There are tools to be mastered and men to be handled. Each calling opens up a wide horizon for the stimulation of the imagination, for emulation in embryo, for composition and dramatization and even for more serious apprenticeship in the future. It is only through familiarity and experiment with the existing methods of policing, punishment and discipline, that we are ever going to find some simple path out of the existing maze of law, chained as it is to outworn tradition and precedent; and the Home School is the proper and natural place for such experiments, to be carried out under careful guidance and stimulation.

To try and build up an institution for its own sake only results in cutting off the children from life. If education means anything it must surely include the provision of means for experiencing every phase of adult life in embryo form. The school must be a laboratory not merely for absorbing knowledge, or for producing sheltered hot-house growth, but for giving out, for adventure into the realm of practical economics and self-preservation, of self-discipline and self-government, of self-expression in the world of spiritual abstraction and human welfare.

To omit this function of neighbourly service is to deprive the child of one of the greatest privileges of the home, where certain service is taken for granted, and already too many schools exist for the depriving of children of the privilege of helping themselves or their fellows, and for the encouragement of an unnatural spirit of competition. It is in fact, just out of such self-centred institutions, concerned primarily

with their own success in scholarship or games, their own wealth in numbers of students or size of buildings, and run in competition with neighbouring institutions burdened with similar obsessions, that arises that spirit of sectarianism, of nationalism, of selfish individualism and self-assertion, which produces in the world the most insidious form of dissension and spiritual blindness.

The Home School, through its extension side, is brought instantly into touch with life. Meteorology becomes the study of the weather in its relation to crop production, and history the examination of data collected in the neighbourhood concerning local industries and crafts, customs and religious expression, traditions of music and drama, but especially concerning forms of social organization and of that co-operative enterprise, which is so slow of growth and yet so significant for progress in the future. Only on such a basis is it likely that a Renaissance of the countryside will come, not at the expense of the past, but firmly based upon all the wealth of previous experience and in association for a common end.

Once kindle the dry relics of the past, rapidly disintegrating to-day under the influence of new forces and agencies which will have caught this ancient civilization unawares; once fire the enthusiasm, the will-to-experiment of youth, and the new day will dawn.

So much of our education in the past has disregarded the fundamental law of Nature, the cycle of life. Where Nature is ever shortening the weaning time of the developing organism, we insist upon extending it indefinitely, through

school-days and college. From the moment the mother-supply, in seed or egg, is exhausted, down must go the roots, searching and experimenting, up must go the young stalk and spread its leaves into the sky, or the young chick venture out alone in search of its own food. From the first also, in Nature, there is a giving up, a pouring out, in preparation for the time when the organism will devote its whole energy to some great act of self-sacrifice, some service on behalf of its own kind, the result of which may bear no direct benefit to itself.

We do not claim that the Home School should be self-supporting from the start. That would be a desecration of Nature's own law. But this is no reason for depriving the child of the privilege of working for his own self-support, so far as his ability allows, taking into full account his need for physical, mental and moral growth and enjoyment. So long as the motto of the Home School is 'Freedom for Growth,' there need be no fear that his powers will be overtaxed.

Freedom for growth, experiment, enterprise and adventure, all are dependent upon Imagination, that greatest of gifts, that function of the mind upon which all progress depends. To release the Imagination, to give it wings, to 'open wide the mind's caged door,' this is the most vital service that it is in the power of one human being to render to another, and one to which the Superintendent of the Siksha-Satra must pay constant and undivided attention. It is this gift of imaginative power which distinguishes man so markedly from the eating, preying, procreating animal, and which like the lamp of Aladdin endows him with the power to create a new world for himself after his own fashion.

Of all conflicts in the field of education, that between Imagination and Discipline is the most bitter and prolonged. On the one side stands the child, relieved so often of all responsibility for his own self-preservation, of the worries that accompany the winning of a livelihood, craving the fullest freedom to satisfy the fertile imaginings of his brain, imaginings which like tender plants can so easily be crushed and mutilated, revolting against the bonds of what seems so often an unreasoned discipline, and on the whole much preferring the rule of a simple anarchy, which means no rule at all. On the other side stand the parent and schoolmaster—practical people of the world, with full experience of its toil and hardship, lovers of law and order, of routine and the commonplace, because they represent the known in the struggle for life, their imagination long ago crushed out in the struggle for practical ends—determined to save the child all trouble of experiencing for himself.

If a child is to have freedom for growth it must have freedom to regulate its own life, freedom from interference and supervision; but such sheer anarchy may lead to a licence of growth which may endanger the whole structure. Of all problems, then, this one of finding the minimum of discipline that is necessary for the preservation of the maximum of liberty is the most difficult. To encourage the children to set their own bounds and to reason out their own discipline, needs a real faith in their capacity and a real courage—the courage to stand by and watch mistakes being made without constantly interfering to set everything right.

There is unquestionably a legitimate field for the setting

up of rules. Certain functions, included under the heading of housecraft, and intimately related with the task of self-preservation, have to be performed by every citizen every day. Upon their proper performance depends the well-being of the individual as well as that of the group. They include, cooking, eating, washing-up, bathing, sweeping—in a word the general care of the body and the dwelling. Until the body is free it is hard for the mind to soar, and thus the body itself is a serious obstacle to anarchy of an extreme kind. Each of these duties, with the help of strict discipline, can be performed in a rapid and efficient manner, thereby adding to the hours of freedom. Children have sufficient common sense to recognize the need for such discipline and can make their own rules prescribing penalties for breaches of it.

On the other hand the ideal behind the running of the workshop must be one of freedom from superimposed restriction, for craftsmanship has its own standards of excellence, and supplies its own discipline. Provided that the endeavour is intimately related to life—whether co-operative, as it often will be, or merely individual—the fullest satisfaction can be gained only in the most perfect manifestation of the capacity to create. The boy's own self-respect in the first instance, followed up by the opinion of the group, both flavoured by a spice of market value—all these in their own way will provide sufficient discipline.

How often do we stifle the child's imagination for fear that he will never grow up a practical man! Like the brethren of Joseph we have an inborn dislike for brilliant dreamers, who upset the even course of our conventional existence.

Yet it is just to the men of imagination that we owe our progress in discovery—to those who, while recognizing the necessary grammar, were willing to leap out into the dark of the unknown, to dream and to imagine new worlds of their own creation. Steering by the light of an anarchic discontent, man has explored and is still exploring every sea of human knowledge, driven forward by the breezes of his fertile imagination. But with the child we insist that he shall not start out on his voyage until he has learned off by heart the chart we have drawn for him out of our own experience, whilst his little ship of life, anchored within the school-room, wallows in the untroubled calm of the conventional, the artificial and the unimaginative.

It is only through the fullest development of all his capacities that man is likely to achieve his real freedom. He must be so equipped as no longer to be anxious about his own self-preservation; only through his capacity to understand and to sympathize with his neighbour can he function as a decent member of human society and as a responsible citizen. In the course of the slow growth of the spirit of detachment, he will also eventually succeed in finding a natural outlet for his inborn capacity for creative expression in that world of abstraction which is also the world of spiritual truth. To have discovered the best means of self-expression as an individual, as a citizen and as a creative agent, and to experience daily the delights and the difficulties of perpetual growth—this is true freedom.

Any scheme, then, which fails to present to the child the opportunity to make these discoveries for itself, is seriously

at fault. Education is sometimes called a tool and is thought of as a factory process. Much of it is perhaps so, and the raw material, the child, is caught and moulded into the desired product as with a machine. But education implies growth and therefore life, and school-time should be a phase of life where the child begins to achieve freedom through experience. By taking it for granted that a child can be taught freedom we deny it life.

There is a world beyond the walls both of home and workshop, outside even the ken of Nature, which can be entirely a man's own, where anarchy is supreme. This is the world of abstraction and of emotion. Having attained self-confidence as to his power to subsist by the labour of his hands, and thus to survive within the human family, both adult and child are free to pass into this other region, where there is no grammar except that which the adventurer makes for his own convenience, nor any rules or regulations.

There are very few children to whom this realm of abstraction and emotional expression, this world of the spirit, this kingdom of creative enterprise for its own sake apart from economic or ulterior motive, is not a very real thing indeed. We may stimulate, we may encourage and sympathize, we may provide the means and the opportunity, but if we are honest in our desire to give the child freedom to grow we shall be very careful not to superimpose our own rules, creeds and regulations. The spirit of childhood, like its gift of imagination, bloweth where it listeth, and like the wind it comes and goes, and knows no man-made law. To be real it must be spontaneous. Complete freedom then the child

must have, to adventure in the realm of song, of music, of poetry, if it wishes, of drama and dance, to revel in the expression of ideas through colour, line or form, or to wander on the limitless horizon of solitary thought and meditation, in touch with the still small voice within.

To imagine that we can teach the child religion is as reasonable as to think that we can teach an orchid to grow and produce flowers to our taste. A suitable soil we can give, some stimulating fertilizer, some source of moisture and a temperature properly adjusted so that Nature may take her own course. But the law of life is growth, and a recognition of all the principles of growth is essential before we can decide what is good for the plant. To try and compel growth, to infuse life from outside, that is the way to bind and destroy.

Life, to be life at all, has to be lived; and the parents' or professors' sins of repression and deprivation, of rod and ironbound rule, are visited upon the children unto the third and fourth generation.

The Philosophical Approach to Sriniketan

Rabindranath Tagore

THE IDEAL WHICH LIES AT THE heart of spiritual endeavour in India is Mukti, or Freedom.

The mantram, or text, for meditation, which was given to me when I was a boy, is composed of three different sentences from three Upanishads. In my own spiritual path toward the attainment of inner freedom, it has been the guiding light. At first I used it only as a recitation, and its meaning was merely philological. With added growth and experience of life, the deeper significance of the words is being gradually unfolded in my mind.

The text runs: *Satyam Jnanam Anantam Brahma, Ananda-rupamamritam yadvibhati, Shantam Shivam Advaitam.* 'Brahma is Truth, He is Wisdom, He is Infinite; He is revealed in endless forms of Delight or Joy; He is Peace, He is Goodness, He is One.'

We are born conscious of one truth, which is for us the background to our knowledge of all other truths. It is the truth about *myself*, and consists of an inner reality with certain outer manifestations. The manifestations can be proved and measured, but not the inner reality, or that deeper self, which gives to the outer manifestations their unity. There

have been people to whom the diverse facts about the movements of my conscious or outer self are all that is real, but not the deeper truth within me, which is one. It requires no help from logic for me to realize the *Satyam*, the Truth, that One exists who not only comprehends all the facts of my life, but who transcends them.

By the indwelling light of this truth, I know that the world to which I belong, and which consists of an endless series of movements, has an inner truth of its own which is one, and which gives reality to the innumerable facts we know about the universe. When we realize this inner truth, we experience *Ananda*, Joy, for through Joy we discover the eternal harmony of our own reality.

So often we ignore the real truth of a man and only deal with surface facts about him. The man who sells things to me is, for myself, a mere fact. The man whom I employ as my servant is a bundle of certain facts, all useful in the particular facts and circumstances of my life. Through such facts I find the satisfaction of many of my needs, but no joy. For joy comes only when we realize the harmony of the *Satyam*, or Truth, that is in us, with the *Satyam*, or Truth, that is in others, and, in this case, in my servant. But with regard to our loved ones, we are directly aware of the deeper truth which is constantly manifested through them in their outer life, because with them we more easily realize a mutual spiritual affinity. Their outer activities may hold no value for our own life's purpose, nay, they may even be a hindrance. They have, however, an ultimate value for us in that they *are*, that they embody, an inner truth which is also within me.

It is, of course, entirely open to us to treat this world as though it consisted of facts not at all related to an inner truth, and as if they had no affinity with the truth we carry deep in our own personality. By making this kind of use of our environment, we may even grow rich and achieve power over others. Thereby we shall find, however, no fulfilment of our spirit, nor in such a relationship are we likely to realize that deeper freedom which gives us Joy. True freedom lies not in throwing off those bonds which tie us to our fellows, but in the realization of a truth of relationship wherein we have no need to abide as aliens. In the world of Nature we may take our part in that perpetual tug of war which we call the struggle for existence; yet in the realm of spirit we can and do realize a unity of kinship with the Supreme One. In this sense of Union lies Truth, for *Brahma* is *Satyam*, Truth; in this Union lies *Mukti*, Freedom.

The deeper Truth in us not only *is*, but *knows*. It may be manifest through outer movements, but within lies its own conscious unity of purpose. In the light of this deeper truth we realize that the *Satyam*, the Truth, which is revealed in this universe, is also *Jnanam*, Wisdom, the eternal reality of digested knowledge. We would not know anything if that knowing were not a part of all that is and that happens, and if world-movements were not relative to some general co-ordination of wisdom. Thus, we can only realize our deepest freedom when in all our relationships we achieve *Jnanam*, Wisdom. To this end, we have continuously to extend our self-knowledge, to widen our experience and to exert control over our self-seeking impulses. As *Jnanam*,

Wisdom, is the attribute of *Brahma*, who is also the Supreme Truth, so we can and do realize *Jnanam* in our own personal relationships when and where they express the disinterested greatness of the eternal. It is through the quality of such relationships that we reach a sense of Freedom, of *Mukti*.

The truth in us not only is and knows, but it finds joy in expressing itself, in giving itself out. The truest form of our expression comes out of the deeper consciousness of our abundance. Our surface self is merely the limitation we carry in and about us.

If this surface self were absolutely real in its own right, then it would be the height of folly on our part to curtail it in any way. But, as a matter of experience, we find that the expression of all our highest delights seeks some form of the giving up of self. In fact, the degree of our realization of a deeper truth is gauged by the degree of our self-renunciation. Our knowledge produces great concepts in the worlds of science and of philosophy, not through the compulsion of our immediate needs, but through the joy that comes to an imagination that is full and running over. This is why seekers of deeper truth in all departments and subdivisions of life are so often forgetful of their own material self-interest. Even the cavemen of the prehistoric age, in the ornamenting of the walls of their dwellings with pictures of animals, must have spent a great deal of time and energy in exercising their creative imagination. Their time might have been more practically and fruitfully employed in hunting the animals themselves. Why then did they do it unless to express some creative urge within themselves?

The work we do, urged by our daily need, may be constructive, but it is not necessarily, or at all, creative in this deeper sense. When a man of genius produces his works primarily for the purpose of expressing some ideal of perfection, be it in forms, in ideas or in service, he gives expression to his own deeper consciousness of the infinite within. Hence, we realize from our own inner experience that *Brahma* is not only *Satyam*, Truth, and *Jnanam*, Wisdom, but that he is *Anantam*, Infinite. Otherwise all our endeavours in the deeper regions of creative work and life, of love and of self-sacrifice, would lose their basis of reality.

The next part of our text is: *Anandarupamamritam yadvibhati.* '*Brahma* reveals himself in deathless forms of Joy.' Our own best creations, too, have this deathless form or quality of joy, because they are the outcome of the delight which accompanies our consciousness of the perfect, our comprehension of the ideal.

The concluding part of our text is: *Shantam Shivam Advaitam.* '*Brahma* is Peace, is Goodness, is One.' The Supreme Being, *Brahma*, who is *Satyam-Jnanam-Anantam* in his manifestation, also assumes these three other aspects which run parallel to his three attributes.

In the realm of our daily existence, *Shantam*, Peace, emerges out of that harmony which is maintained by law and order. In the human world, law and order give us the outward freedom needed for the normal process of our daily life, for the external necessities of existence.

In the deeper realm of *Jnanam*, Wisdom, the ideal of perfection lies in the inner harmony of conscious relationship.

The character of this inner harmony is *Shivam*, Goodness or Love. Through law we find the freedom of peace in the external world of existence, through Goodness or Love we find our freedom in the world of deeper social relationship. Such freedom of realization is possible only because Supreme Truth is *Shantam*, is *Shivam*, is Peace, is Goodness, is Love.

Brahma is also *Advaitam*, is One. This we know when, through our union with another in love, we realize freedom of spirit in its deepest sense. Only when it can afford to accept bondage, does freedom truly prove itself, when its pursuit presents no burden and when its responsibilities are joyfully accepted. So many of the activities of the world are beautiful because at the heart of the world lies the peace of law. By law the world finds that rhythm and that balance which are the external evidence of a deeper freedom.

In any revelation of genuine goodness in human society, there is that kind of grace which lends to the acceptance of responsibility a dignity and a sweetness; reflected in such grace our activities discover a freedom of their own. In love, troubles, infinite in number, lose their pressure. Their burden we willingly bear, to prove the freedom that our spirit realizes when it finds itself united to others, across the limits of self. This is possible because *Brahma* is *Advaitam*, is One.

As individuals, each of us possesses the unity of a living organism, distinct in himself. As social beings, we are parts of the complex organism we call humanity. As spiritual beings, we belong to a Reality which is *Anantam*, Infinite, which is *Shivam*, Goodness, which is all-comprehensive.

Each individual living organism has its own need and

faculty for self-preservation. The education of man should allow room for a training in the perfect maintenance of his individual life. Otherwise not only does he become helpless, but this faculty for self-preservation, the exercise of which gives him a true enjoyment of life, can atrophy altogether. Generally speaking, in our process of education this training of how to live our physical life is neglected; therefore we miss the *Shantam*, the Peace, on which the self-reliant freedom of a well-organized existence depends.

The adjustment of our individual life to our social life, and of these two with the vast life of man, needs for its training the spirit and acceptance of mutual responsibility. In our educational institutions, training and experience in this type of adjustment hardly find a place. The discipline of self-control, and the need for good behaviour, is, no doubt, recognized; but that service of society which requires the careful gathering and sifting of accurate information, experience in, as well as the exercise of, a wide variety of our physical, moral and intellectual faculties, is ignored. The result of such a deficiency in our adolescent experience we find everywhere in our willingness to accept the appalling conditions of our surroundings, in the form of poverty, disease, ignorance, feebleness of intellect and of will, and also in that aggressive spirit of egotism and self-assertion associated with the cult of sectarianism, of institutionalism, and of nationalism, that creates in the human world the worst forms of dissension and of spiritual blindness. Owing to this lack of training in sympathetic understanding, man suffers from the want of that true freedom in his social life, which comes from his deeper

consciousness of the need for welfare and for a widespread atmosphere of mutual sympathy and co-operation.

I have said before that the world, viewed as a mere external fact, does not delight us; that, unless we know that it has a fullness of reality deep in its background and foundation, our relation with it can become and can remain merely utilitarian. When in our own deeper spiritual being we fail to find some deeper harmony or meaning in the universe, we lose faith in ourselves and proceed to sink all our resources in the pursuit of immediate self-interest. Ordinarily, our processes of education do nothing to train our minds for the realization of our deeper spiritual relationship with the Supreme Truth. For want of this training, we fail to develop that spirit of detachment that gives us the broader atmosphere, within which our inner being finds a natural dwelling and the space and the leisure for fulfilment in imaginative creation. Our creations in the worlds of science, of philosophy, of art, and of literature can reach their fullness of growth only under a sky of this kind of detachment.

It is sometimes objected that such creations are mere abstractions. That may be so. But music is none the less valuable because it is not the voice of our everyday life. Music flourishes quite apart from life's ordinary noises, in a disinterested realm of delight all of its own. By reason of such an abstraction, such aloofness, or detachment, it acquires a power of its own with which it brings enrichment to life.

Owing to its distance and freedom from immediate contact with earth, the vapour that forms clouds in the sky above

us can send a gift of rain back to the earth, making the air sweet and the soil fertile. So our knowledge, feelings and experience, at one stage of their growth and progress, are abstracted from life, transported into the bosom of the eternal, purged there of all that is non-essential, and sent back to life with the velocity of a new impact of the kind needed for the further rousing of countless and still latent forces.

The minds of those who, in the pursuit of their immediate or daily needs, cling closely to the soil of life, grow dull. Mind, to discover freedom of outlook, must soar into the upper air of abstraction, swim into the very heart of the infinite for the mere joy of it, and then fly back to its nest in the world.

In all great civilizations there is a cycle which consists of sending adventurous minds into the upper and wider spaces, and then of bringing them down again, and so back to solid ground. The solid earth would be suffocated to death if it were to lose the atmosphere around it, indefinite, invisible, and unsubstantial though this atmosphere may seem to be. It is, after all, thanks to the atmosphere that communication with air and light remains possible at all. So, too, the mind of man must also be able to achieve its own atmosphere of detachment, where the immediate objective can never be the production of the necessities of our daily life, but rather the giving of life to all those creations that best express man's unlimited capacity, in the provinces of thought, of emotion and of will.

Our ideal should be to make ample provision in our homes and in our schools for that development of our spiritual

relationship with the Supreme Being, which may best give us a sense of freedom in all departments of life. We know full well that life divested of a deeper consciousness of the Infinite can breed only new and diverse forms of slavery under the appearance of liberty.

Allow me to quote in this connection what I have said elsewhere while discussing my plan for an ideal educational institution:—

> The one abiding ideal in the religious life of India has been *Mukti*, Freedom, the deliverance of man's soul from the grip of self, its communion with the Infinite Soul through its union in *Ananda*, Joy, with the universe. This religion of spiritual harmony is not a theological doctrine to be taught, as a subject in the class, for half-an-hour each day. It is the spiritual truth and beauty of our attitude towards our surroundings. It is our conscious relationship with the Infinite, and the lasting power of the Eternal in the passing moments of our life. Such a religious ideal can only be made possible by making provision for students to live in intimate touch with Nature, daily to grow in an atmosphere of service offered to all creatures, tending trees, feeding birds and animals, learning to feel the immense mystery of the soil and water and air.
>
> Along with this, there should be some common sharing of life with the tillers of the soil and the humble workers in the neighbouring villages; studying their crafts, inviting them to the feasts, joining them in works of co-operation for communal welfare; and in our inter-

course we should be guided, not by moral maxims or the condescension of social superiority, but by natural sympathy of life for life, and by the sheer necessity of love's sacrifice for its own sake. In such an atmosphere students would learn to understand that humanity is a divine harp of many strings waiting for its one grand music. Those who realize this unity are made ready for the pilgrimage through the night of suffering, and along the path of sacrifice, to the great meeting of Man in the future, for which the call comes to us across the darkness.

Life, in such a centre, should be simple and clean. We should never believe that simplicity of life might make us unsuited to the requirements of the society of our time. It is the simplicity of the tuning-fork, which is needed all the more because of the intricacy of strings in the instrument. In the morning of our career, our nature needs the pure, perfect note of a spiritual ideal, in order to fit us for the complications of later years.

In other words, this institution should be a perpetual creation by the co-operative enthusiasm of teachers and students, growing with the growth of their soul; a world in itself: self-sustaining, independent, rich with ever-renewing life, radiating life across space and time, attracting and maintaining round it a planetary system of dependent bodies. Its aim should lie in imparting life-breath to the complete man, who is intellectual as well as economic: bound by social bonds, but aspiring towards spiritual freedom and final perfection.*

* 'Creative Unity' (Macmillan & Co. Ltd, 1922)

The Parrot's Training

Rabindranath Tagore

ONCE UPON A TIME THERE WAS a bird It was ignorant. It sang all right, but never recited scriptures. It hopped pretty frequently, but lacked manners.

Said the Raja to himself: 'Ignorance is costly in the long run. For fools consume as much food as their betters, and yet give nothing in return.'

He called his nephews to his presence and told them that the bird must have a sound schooling.

The pundits were summoned, and at once went to the root of the matter. They decided that the ignorance of birds was due to their natural habit of living in poor nests. Therefore, according to the pundits, the first thing necessary for this bird's education was a suitable cage.

The pundits had their rewards and went home happy.

A golden cage was built with gorgeous decorations. Crowds came to see it from all parts of the world. 'Culture, captured and caged!' exclaimed some, in a rapture of ecstasy, and burst into tears. Others remarked: 'Even if culture be missed, the cage will remain, to the end, a substantial fact. How fortunate for the bird!'

The goldsmith filled his bag with money and lost no time in sailing homewards.

The pundit sat down to educate the bird. With proper deliberation he took his pinch of snuff, as he said: 'Text-books can never be too many for our purpose!'

The nephews brought together an enormous crowd of scribes. They copied from books, and copied from copies, till the manuscripts were piled up to an unreachable height. Men murmured in amazement. 'Oh, the tower of culture, egregiously high! The end of it lost in the clouds!'

The scribes, with light hearts, hurried home, their pockets heavily laden.

The nephews were furiously busy keeping the cage in proper trim. As their constant scrubbing and polishing went on, the people said with satisfaction: 'This is progress indeed!'

Men were employed in large numbers and supervisors were still more numerous. These, with their cousins of all different degrees of distance, built a palace for themselves and lived there happily ever after.

Whatever may be its other deficiencies, the world is never in want of fault-finders; and they went about saying that every creature remotely connected with the cage flourished beyond words, excepting only the bird.

When this remark reached the Raja's ears, he summoned his nephews before him and said: 'My dear nephews, what is this that we hear?'

The nephews said in answer: 'Sire, let the testimony of the goldsmiths and the pundits, the scribes and the super-

visors be taken, if the truth is to be known. Food is scarce with the fault-finders, and that is why their tongues have gained in sharpness.'

The explanation was so luminously satisfactory that the Raja decorated each one of his nephews with his own rare jewels.

The Raja at length, being desirous of seeing with his own eyes how his Education Department busied itself with the little bird, made his appearance one day at the great Hall of Learning.

From the gate rose the sounds of conch-shells and gongs, horns, bugles and trumpets, cymbals, drums and kettle-drums, tomtoms, tambourines, flutes, fifes, barrel-organs and bagpipes. The pundits began chanting mantras with their topmost voices, while the goldsmiths, scribes, supervisors, and their numberless cousins of all different degrees of distance, loudly raised a round of cheers.

The nephews smiled and said: 'Sire, what do you think of it all?'

The Raja said: 'It does seem so fearfully like a sound principle of Education!'

Mightily pleased, the Raja was about to remount his elephant, when the fault-finder, from behind some bush, cried out: 'Maharaja, have you seen the bird?'

'Indeed, I have not!' exclaimed the Raja. 'I completely forgot about the bird.'

Turning back, he asked the pundits about the method they followed in instructing the bird. It was shown to him. He was immensely impressed. The method was so stupen-

dous that the bird looked ridiculously unimportant in comparison. The Raja was satisfied that there was no flaw in the arrangements. As for any complaint from the bird itself, that simply could not be expected. Its throat was so completely choked with the leaves from the books that it could neither whistle nor whisper. It sent a thrill through one's body to watch the process.

This time, while remounting his elephant, the Raja ordered his State ear-puller to give a thorough good pull at both the ears of the fault-finder.

The bird thus crawled on, duly and properly, to the safest verge of inanity. In fact, its progress was satisfactory in the extreme. Nevertheless, Nature occasionally triumphed over training, and when the morning light peeped into the bird's cage it sometimes fluttered its wings in a reprehensible manner. And, though it is hard to believe, it pitifully pecked at its bars with its feeble beak.

'What impertinence!' growled the kotwal.

The blacksmith, with his forge and hammer, took his place in the Raja's Department of Education. Oh, what resounding blows! The iron chain was soon completed, and the bird's wings were clipped.

The Raja's brothers-in-law looked black, and shook their heads, saying: 'These birds not only lack good sense, but also gratitude!'

With text-book in one hand and baton in the other, the pundits gave the poor bird what may fitly be called lessons!

The kotwal was honoured with a title for his watchfulness, and the blacksmith for his skill in forging chains.

The bird died.

Nobody had the least notion how long ago this had happened. The fault-finder was the first man to spread the rumour.

The Raja called his nephews and asked them, 'My dear nephews, what is this that we hear?'

The nephews said: 'Sire, the bird's education has been completed.'

'Does it hop?' the Raja enquired.

'Never!' said the nephews.

'Does it fly?'

'No.'

'Bring me the bird,' said the Raja.

The bird was brought to him, guarded by the kotwal and the sepoys and the sowars. The Raja poked its body with his finger. Only its inner stuffing of book-leaves rustled.

Outside the window, the murmur of the spring breeze amongst the newly budded asoka leaves made the April morning wistful.

The Art of Movement in Education

Rabindranath Tagore

In 1924 I accompanied Tagore on a lecture tour to South America. He fell ill and, during his convalescence in Argentina, he talked to me on several occasions about the importance of expressing thoughts and feelings in physical movement. He did this particularly in the knowledge that I was planning to set up a new school in England, where such ideas could be tried out, as eventually they were at Dartington Hall. The following is a transcript of his discourse, which I took down at the time in the form of extensive notes. Only three short sentences of a personal nature have been omitted, otherwise it is a faithful record, set out in paragraphs for the sake of readability. *L. K. E.*

POUPEE* TRIES TO SPEAK TO ME with the whole of her body. Meeting me on the boat, she expressed her delight in the form of a dance of her own design. As she danced, her speech was through her whole body. Life is sweet, she wanted to say, the world is beautiful, but having as yet no language of words, her small mind, stirred to its depths, broke out into a complex movement of dance. Her whole body moved as if to music.

*Poupee : the pet name of the Poet's adopted grand-daughter, aged 2½.

It is a function of the body, not merely to carry out vital actions so that we may live and move, but so that we may express, and not with the face alone, but with the legs, the arms and the hands. All our limbs have their own power to express. This truth came to me one day in London. One of your people, a great thinker, asked me to lunch with him. I won't give you his name, but there he was, another philosopher, sitting opposite me. Suddenly, he left his chair and began to walk up and down. As soon as his thoughts had started circulating in his mind, he felt he needed the accompaniment of a circulation of movement, a co-ordination of his body. This was because his mind felt a vital connection with his body, and his body with the spontaneous and natural movement of his mind. The act of leaving his chair and of walking up and down expressed the demand of his body for free play for his thoughts.

We often take a brisk walk when we are agitated, because thought needs bodily expression if it is to perform its work freely and fully. Children must dance. They must be restless. When they think, the body becomes restless and ripples with a variety of movement that helps to keep their muscles in harmony with the mind.

In children the whole body is expressive. It is in going to school that we take our first false step. There we are bidden to think sitting. We mustn't move our arms. To our teacher we present so many masks. All the time we are forced to control those lines of movement that would parallel and accompany our thoughts. Whenever, as children, we are stirred emotionally or feel receptive to thought,

we need an appropriate accompaniment of physical movement.

Children can quite quickly acquire the habit of receiving thoughts sitting still. Their minds have then to think unaided by the collaboration of the body. The body, in its turn, feels neglected because it is not aiding its great partner, the mind, in its internal work. Our minds suffer ever after as a result. This does not mean that for certain kinds of thinking you need never sit still. Sometimes, as in the world of mathematics, you have, if you are to apply all your physical and mental energy to a problem, to eliminate all distracting movement, especially when you wish to explore to the depths a complex subject. For particular kinds of thinking, sitting still can be useful.

But for creative work the mind acts as a co-ordinator of ideas, and we discover best by thinking and by expressing. When we try to express ourselves merely in words, we feel incomplete, and for the fullest expression there should certainly be arm and leg movement as well. The poet, or the musician, gesticulates as he works. He must move his arms or his hands, and wrinkle his face. Why, then, doesn't he start up from his chair and dance his ideas out in the sunshine? Because he's been to school. It is at school that he has learnt the habit of stifling so thoroughly the natural companionship of body with mind. His widowed body feels neglected, because he has lost the art of composing or of thinking whilst he is dancing or moving. The result is that the whole body, which is designed for expression through movement, loses one of its most important missions in life,

the urge to express. The body becomes feeble, and only the face retains some power and freedom to express through movement. As you think, you wrinkle your forehead. As you smile, or as you weep, each emotion is expressed in some movement of your face. But as a small child, you smiled with the whole of your body, you wept with every muscle you had, and in anger you beat with your feet upon the ground. The whole body tried to express whatever deep emotion you felt. This power and this freedom we have deliberately mutilated, and of both we have deprived our children.

When I was young, my body was very expressive and graceful. All my limbs worked perfectly in harmony. Then I sat down and began to give too much time just to thinking. I wrote sitting, a process in which the whole of my body took no part at all. Only my face screwed itself up, and now and then I would stretch my arms. While the rest of the body remained still, my muscles became inarticulate. In this way the body may continue to perform its other utilitarian functions, but it loses grace. I may have retained some element of beauty in my face and even in the movement of my arms, but the general shape and form of my limbs has lost something that was invaluable to me in my early youth. Only my face and arms today retain any ability to express what my mind is thinking.

You remember our seeing together those great Japanese actors, and our discussion of the training they underwent, so that with their whole bodies they could express any idea the play demanded from them. They had specialized in this

power from childhood, using every muscle in the body to convey some specific emotion or a single idea. Every limb, and not just the muscles of the face, should have a part of its own to play, and should know how to give to our inner sentiments their own perfection of expression. There is a wealth of language in movement that it should be simple for us to exploit and to realize. To find expression for a single sentiment, all our limbs must be free to move and act. Why not then admit that in the process of thinking there are two stages: the act of thought itself, and the process of giving to that thought appropriate form or shape, even though not in words? The grouping and shaping of these thoughts should be expressed in rhythm of movement and the body should sway with the inner movement of the thought.

The best actors will always be those who have been trained to use the whole body as a tool for the expression of thought, of emotion or of sentiment. Words, to convey the full perfection of their message, must be accompanied by the appropriate bodily movement. If our schools were run on the right lines, boys and girls would never lose their natural gifts of bodily expression, making use for that purpose of all their limbs.

Unfortunately, today, in civilized communities, expression through movement is repressed and is no longer looked upon as quite proper. Turning your face into a blank mask helps you to live in a crowd and among strangers without attracting notice, and thus you can achieve respectability. It is much safer to learn how to repress any vivid form of expression. By constant practice we can, and

have, become adepts at concealing our real sentiments and thoughts. Sometimes we want to experience once again this freedom, this power to express thought or sentiments. Then we have to employ men who have specialized in such an art from birth, and are not at all like the ordinary run of human beings, who have altogether lost it. We pay actors, therefore, to cultivate their natural gifts, and to give us the chance of experiencing the joys we crave, but can no longer achieve through the repression of our bodies. We get a kind of vicarious enjoyment by watching great actors perform a part. It is only to a few outstanding professional actors that we permit the expression of ideas through the use of all the limbs and of the body. We need, then, to think deeply as to whether we cannot make some new kind of compromise between our bodies and our minds.

It is true that we cannot any longer be spontaneous or natural in the expression of our feelings before strangers. The cultivation of such an art would have to be the outcome of special training. In the developing of your own school, I advise you to make the practice of drama and of the histrionic arts compulsory for all children. We must make dramatic performance a regular subject of education. Children need the opportunity to give expression of their sentiments through perfect and graceful movements of the body. Never allow this capacity to use the whole body as a medium of expression to die out. Man, as a fraction of a multitude, may feel he has to repress his individuality. Let us defy this feeling. So—introduce the dramatic arts into your school from the beginning. This is the only way.

But you can also have walking classes, once a week, perhaps on Sundays. Boys and girls should become accustomed to talking and learning whilst walking, and the teachers too. They should not just sit like statues in a museum all the week. If you can let these walks be oftener than once a week, so much the better. For walking can also be a most natural accompaniment to thinking. It is when man turns himself into a vagabond or a tramp that talk becomes natural and spontaneous. Lessons or ideas can then be assimilated the more easily. Talk becomes organic.

By repressing all activity of the body, so many school lessons remain absolutely dead and ineffective. To compel the mind to use only one portion of the body in the learning process is not natural. In the process of taking in and of digesting our food, a whole symphony of life is being performed in which heart, eyes, tongue and ears are playing their part. The same process should occur when you are taking in your lessons or trying to swallow useful information. You can, with the help of the class-room, dull all the faculties. But Life should be entire, a co-ordination of all the different faculties and functions. There should be nothing dead or inert about life in school. I would allow all our boys and girls during class to jump up, even to climb into a tree, to run off and chase after a cat or dog, or to pick some fruit off a branch. This is really why my classes were preferred, not because I was any special good as a teacher. I tried to keep in mind the need of the child to use the whole of its body in acquiring a vocabulary and in mastering a sentence.

I remember, in teaching English, I was trying to get the children to master the idea of 'tearing', verb 'to tear'. Now it would have been easy enough to demonstrate by tearing a leaf from a book, but instead I asked each of them to climb to the top of the nearest mango tree and to tear off a leaf and bring it back to me. The whole process of tearing, when accompanied by such a full body movement, became a living thing. Most of our teachers used to get disgusted when they heard the children in my class laughing and shouting and clapping their hands. A boy would say to me, 'May I go for a run?' 'Yes, of course', I would say, because I knew that by this means some tedium would be broken and that when again he felt lively, it would be much easier for him to receive and to digest. It is while children feel dull, from the passivity of their minds and through being asked to be inert receptacles, without any activity of body, that they cease altogether to assimilate the non-living lesson.

We should understand that, in reality, the body is one with the mind. If, with Gandhi, you believe that, though wedded, we should all live celibate lives, then life is bound to be incomplete anyhow one way or another. You cannot separate them into different compartments. My only wish as a poet is to be free to walk in the open air and to use a pen while the body is responding to the mind, in rhythm. According to such a rhythm I would punctuate. Suddenly, I should be moving slowly, andante, then allegro, and the time would change with the changes of expression. While composing my poem the body would be helping me with its own movements.

So with children in school. Let them recite while out walking, let them do their thinking aloud. If possible, I would recommend children to carry their notebooks and to go on writing while they are 'on trek'. First these notes would be about the things they see around them, facts and observations of natural history, aspects of the countryside, experiences on the road, of market day, of topics of conversation, of their special interests. All the picturesque details of the life around them they should sketch or record.

I used to encourage them to watch the Santal women filing by with materials for sale on their heads, with their pottery or water vessels, to listen to the singing of the cartmen and to all the signs and sounds peculiar to the roadside on a market day. Sometimes they would record detached, isolated facts only, but to walk along the road on a market day, when loaded bullock carts or women were streaming by, was an exercise for body and mind, for eyes and ears, an exercise in observation, with movement, in writing or sketching at the same time, while walking. By demanding this kind of co-ordination of body and mind, eye and ear together, the exercise could become more and more complex and interesting.

I am perfectly certain that if the whole body were active in all its functions, we should learn that much more rapidly. My school now has 300 boys and girls, but I started with not more than ten and encouraged them to develop widely their freedom of body and mind. The old house had big verandas, long corridors, spacious terraces. Occasionally, I would bring them all out on to the veranda and change the

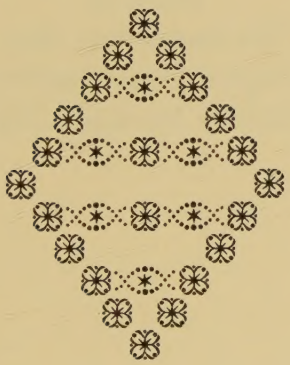
place of the class. When we are ill, the doctor often advises a change of air. Then why not a change while we are well and in school? After the class was over, I made it a rule, the place must be changed for the next class. We would move from the shade of one tree to the shade of another. I insisted on a five minute break so that they could run and dissipate the obstructions of the mind.

Sastrimashai would never allow a child to leave until the whole class was over. He would keep his classes overtime, so that the children had to race to avoid a reprimand from their next teacher. Their time was too much taken up by tyrants, and some reasonable gaps were badly needed between the different regimes of tyranny. Five minutes is not at all too long when children are under pressure between one period and another.

But the moment you leave a little space fallow, the utilitarians will pounce upon it, and say, 'Why leave this space unfilled? You should grow a crop there.' They possess such a superstitious faith in the efficiency of their own teaching, that they don't realize that periods of non-teaching are just as important as a means of tempering formal instruction. Utilitarian by nature, they must fill every niche and leave no space or time for 'Not-teaching'. Poor body. Nature made a perfect adjustment between the body and the mind. It is civilized man who, by his formalism in the classroom, has caused dissension between the two of them, who has severed the connection and made the gap as wide as possible. But body and mind are indissolubly connected. The most natural form of healing is that which takes place through the

suggestion of the mind. We are at last coming to accept this idea. Civilization has built up the barrier between the two, and it is our task to break down this gap and to open up once again the natural passage-ways between the two. The Greeks were probably aware of the need for this inter-relation, for they cultivated a perfect harmony of body and mind. They linked teaching with music and with games.

As a kind of after-thought he continued: 'If only I could be born again and be sufficiently orphaned to be admitted into your Siksha-Satra! Santose is so receptive to ideas and he has great faith in you. In practical affairs he may not be entirely competent, but faith he has and he tries his best.'



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TWO FRIENDS

The names of Leonard and Dorothy Elmhirst are well-known as the founders of Dartington Hall, the estate in Devonshire, which in the last thirty-five years has inspired a wide variety of enterprises in agriculture, forestry, local industry, education and the arts. It is less known that before the venture at Dartington and his marriage in 1925, Leonard Elmhirst spent a number of years in America and India, studying the economic and social implications of the land. In the spring of 1921, while a student at Cornell, he received an invitation from Rabindranath Tagore, the Indian poet and philosopher, to help found an Institute of Rural Reconstruction at the poet's university at Santiniketan in Bengal. The main purpose was to investigate the decline of arts and agriculture, and of traditional life generally, in the villages of the area. Elmhirst accepted the invitation and—after the Institute was launched—accompanied Tagore on journeys about the world. It was the beginning of a lifelong association.

This book gives a fascinating first-hand account of these events, and reveals the scope and savour of Tagore's ideas on education, as expressed in his own inimitable prose. It also gives an insight into the friendship of two remarkable men, each of whom has, in his own way, made the world richer by his acts and ideas.

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